

## REVISED SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY AFTER CUTS OPPOSED

SOME 35 per cent of respondents have objected to plans to raise the walking distance for primary school aged children.

Proposals to cut funding for home-to-school transport were put out to consultation by Walsall Council in September.

The changes would mean youngsters living three miles away from schools across the borough having to walk to attend lessons.

Pupils aged between eight-and-11-years old, who live up to three miles away, will be offered no help with the cost of transport.

The cost-cutting measures could also see a raft of changes brought in to overhaul ways disabled children, or those with special educational needs, get to school. The public has

now had its say and results from the consultation were discussed at a cabinet meeting last Wednesday. It was revealed the public had voiced its opposition to the idea of removing transport for young people aged over 16 with special educational needs, as well as increasing the walking distance for eight-to-11-year-olds.

A revised policy will now be put together and presented at cabinet again in February.

The implementation of any changes will take place in September 2017.

Addressing the meeting, Councillor Rose Burley said: "The report, which I consider to be very robust, has come back from its consultation period. A new report will be submitted to cabinet in 2017."

More than 600 young people with special educational needs currently get assistance with transport each day across the borough.

In response to the consultation, 141 questionnaires were completed and 10 written representations were submitted from organisations and individuals.

While 35 per cent of responses were against raising the 'walking distance' for children aged eight-to-11, 22 per cent were in favour.

A statement attached to the report discussed by cabinet read: "Parents of children with special needs pointed to the possible detrimental effects of these proposals on families getting children to a number of schools at the same time, mainstream and special."

The council had a budget of £1.8 million for the service last year and used 80 per cent of it on direct travel assistance for those children suffering with special needs, or disabilities.

That is set to reduce by at least £250,000 this year and £225,000 in 2017/18.

Hundreds of young people with special educational needs currently get assistance with transport each day provided across the borough.

Councillor Doug James, who is a governor at four Walsall schools, said the review needed more work.

For further information about the service search for Home to School transport on the Walsall Council website.

### CAMERAS

## CCTV helping to catch fly-tippers

CCTV cameras have been set up to combat a village's 'big problem' of fly-tipping.

Walsall Council has confirmed there are more than 20 cases with all but two concerning rubbish being dumped in Aldridge or neighbouring Barr Beacon and said two prosecutions were due to take place.

Aldridge and Beacon area partnerships have also given the council's community protection team £4,800 to buy four covert cameras, for exclusive use in the Aldridge and Beacon area. Area manager John Morris is, in the majority, deployed in the north-east of the borough where there is a big fly-tipping problem.

### SECURITY

## Security prompt issued to schools

SCHOOLS have been issued with a warning to ensure their premises are secure over the Christmas break.

Officers have urged that computers and high-value equipment in particular are stored away and kept out of view.

CCTV and alarm systems should also be checked thoroughly. "Please ensure all windows and doors are secure including gates and access points. Please check all electrical power points are turned off," a police spokeswoman said.

### APPEAL

## Your generosity sees 8,500 items donated

AN incredible 8,500 food items and toiletries have been donated to the Express & Star's Feed a Family This Christmas appeal.

We've been overwhelmed by the kindness of people across the Black Country and Staffordshire who have really dug deep to help those less fortunate.

Every item will go towards helping families put a much-needed meal on the table. Although the campaign ended on Wednesday, we are still collecting donations from businesses and other groups.



# Under-35s are protected from authority's changes RISE IN COUNCIL TAX FOR POOREST

**SOME of Walsall's poorest families will have to pay more council tax under new cost-cutting moves – however, concerns have been raised over 'discriminatory' plans which would see under-35s protected from the changes.**

Struggling families currently have to pay 25 per cent of the total council tax bill under a relief scheme. But they will now have to find the extra cash as the amount they have to pay goes up five per cent from April 1. Council chiefs said this will boost the authority's coffers to the tune of more than £290,000 next year.

But by protecting single under-35s from the changes, the authority has reduced its income from £420,000.

The decision comes amid the council's ongoing efforts to slash £86 million from its budget over the next four years.

Speaking at a cabinet meeting where the proposals were passed, Councillor Diane Coughlan said: "In 2015 we introduced a 25 per cent council tax reduction scheme, and now we are having to consider another increase.

### Lowest

"My concerns regarding these proposals are well known to everyone in this room," she added.

"On a personal level, I am not happy to do this but we find ourselves in a dire financial situation due to government cuts and the previous administration.

"Our aim is to protect those with the lowest income and protect our residents from harm.

"We are being forced to make these cuts – this is the Government getting us to do their dirty work."

Council leader Councillor Sean Coughlan echoed the concerns, saying: "We are moving in a direction of taking on responsibility that should be the Government's

By Jordan Harris

responsibility. The burden will be put on local people."

Other councillors have said they fear the increase in council tax will hit the poorest families hardest and also lead to a rise in council tax arrears.

Councillor Mike Bird said he felt that the decision to not include under-35s in the plans was 'discriminatory'.

He said: "I think it is right that the council have had to do this, I can't argue with that.

"I don't think five per cent will make much of a difference but for me the biggest issue is that they are not imposing this on under-35s.

"You can't have one rule for some and a different rule for another, this could be seen as discriminatory.

"In my opinion, those who are the poorest in Walsall should have to pay nothing, as has been the case in the past.

"I also wonder if the council have considered whether it might be the case that people want to be able to handle this increase but can't actually afford to pay, which leads to more people being in arrears," Councillor Bird added.

## Players score with hospital visit



Walsall players visiting Walsall Manor Hospital and wish fan Des Westwood a happy 80th birthday

WALSALL players showed their true colours off the pitch with a visit to hospital patients.

Twelve of the first team squad and manager Jon Whitney visited wards at Walsall Manor to talk to patients and their families.

It is an annual gesture. This year the players also made time for elderly patients, many of whom are living with dementia, to enjoy a cup of tea and a chat. They also took time out to sing Happy Birthday to 80-year-old Walsall fan Des Westwood.

Walsall captain Adam Chambers said: "We always come and see the children who are in hospital to bring them presents that have been collected by the Walsall Football Supporters Trust.

"We also want to spend some time with elderly patients who may have no family members and may be feeling quite lonely this Christmas."

Debbie Shaw, older people's mental health liaison clinical nurse specialist, said: "This is a lovely gesture from Walsall Football Club."



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# Post Office staff strike over issues

POST Office workers in the Black Country are taking part in five days of strike action including Christmas Eve in a dispute over jobs, pensions and branch closures.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU), behind the protest, is embroiled in a long-running dispute over job losses, the closure of a final salary pension scheme and the franchising of Crown Post Offices, the larger branches usually sited on high streets.

On December 3 staff at the branch on John Street, Willenhall and Dar-

wall Street in Walsall were among hundreds in the country who took part in a 24-hour walkout.

The CWU has yet to state how many Black Country workers are set join the picket lines next week or which branches will be affected.

CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey said: "All of the blame for this unfortunate turn of events is 100 per cent down to the intransigence of the company."

"Our members want the Post Office management to pause its closure and privatisation programme, hold

off on its planned pensions changes, and commit to sitting down with us and with the other key stakeholders of this Great British institution."

"We want to work together to build a positive future for the Post Office, its workforce and, of course, the people who we serve. The CWU can be a constructive partner to work with, but sadly, the people currently running the company have chosen the path of conflict."

The Post Office moved to reassure people that the vast majority of branches would not be involved in the action. Kevin Gil-

liland, the Post Office's network and sales director, said: "We agreed with the CWU that we would resume talks, which have been ongoing throughout the summer."

"We are extremely disappointed that they prefer to resort to calls for strike action and we will be reviewing our position in light of this development. We want to reassure customers that if further strike action takes place next week at least 97 per cent of our 11,600 branches will not be involved. It will be business as usual in almost all of our network."

# Festive tips to ensure pets stay out of trouble

PET owners are being advised on how to keep their animals safe over the festive period. Chain store Pets at Home, which has a branch in Saint Johns Retail Park, Wolverhampton, has offered the advice to pet owners to try and protect their beloved furry friends from harm.

Staff at the store have said that a home full of decorations, food and presents offers an array of new toys, smells and tastes for pets, but many popular Christmas items are unsafe. Wolverhampton store manager, Emma Cartwright, said: "With a little extra care and attention, you can ensure your pet has as great a Christmas as you."

The advice to pet owners is as follows: "Keep fairy lights out of reach that they can't chew through; vacuum regularly to reduce the risk of real or fake pine needles being ingested by your pet; be careful with edible decorations and chocolate gifts under the tree - chocolate contains theobromine which is toxic to dogs and other pets."

"Mince pies, Christmas cake and Christmas pudding contain raisins, which are also toxic for dogs, cooked turkey or chicken bones can splinter and cause serious issues for your pet, so do not feed them any Christmas plants like poinsettias, mistletoe, holly, amaryllis, ferns and pine sap as it is poisonous to cats and dogs."

The advice also says to keep tinsel out of reach of cats and kittens as it can cause serious internal damage and keep burning candles on high shelves or mantels where your pet can't reach.

# Beauty salon plan rejected

PLANNERS refused an application to turn a semi-detached house into a beauty salon in Tipton after 'grave concerns' about parking and privacy on neighbouring properties.

The house in Horseley Heath was proposed to be turned into a family salon offering pamper parties for children, a barber's and an adult salon on the first floor. But Sandwell Council bosses refused the application following a site visit, on the grounds of it being 'out of character' and 'setting a precedent'.

Councillor Pete Allen, who objected along with residents from the next door property, said: "This change of use would cause difficulty in a nice quiet road."

# Final few places left for town race

THERE are fewer than 50 places left for next year's Stafford half marathon.

The run is on March 19 and so far nearly 4,000 people have registered for the 13.1mile race. It is organised by Stafford Borough Council. Next year's capacity of 4,000 runners is up on 2016's 3,500. Runners can enter online at [www.staffordhalf.com](http://www.staffordhalf.com)

# HS2 bosses accused of 'brainwashing' pupils

THE company behind high-speed rail line HS2 has been accused of 'brainwashing' pupils over the benefits of the £55.7 billion project.

The claims came after it signed a £280,000 contract to 'educate' children in primary schools about the scheme.

The deal has been criticised by campaigners who have dubbed it as state-sponsored 'propaganda' promoting the HS2 line.

Key Stage 2 pupils will be encouraged to make a 'zoom train' from cardboard and straws, powered by a balloon. This follows on from a programme in secondary schools along the route of HS2, which encouraged pupils to look at possible routes for 'zoom rail' from London to Birmingham.

Whilst the pack contains the disclaimer 'the materials in this pack are for educational purposes only and are not intended to be a representation of any particular project', campaigners say it is clear that it represents HS2. They add that there are several references to HS2 sources and the entirety of the documents have been produced in HS2 Ltd's format, with the 'zoom train' containing HS2s' logo and 'engine from growth' slogan.

## Integral

The tender document for the primary school engagement programme, which was awarded at a cost of £280,000, states: "The education programme is an integral element of HS2 Ltd's broader approach to creating skills and employment opportunities."

"It aims to educate and inform children, young adults, and their families about HS2 and the employment and training opportunities it will create and support, prioritising schools closest to the line of route, stations and depots, with a focus on schools that are in more deprived areas."

But Joe Rukin, Stop HS2 campaign manager, said: "Just when we thought HS2 Ltd couldn't sink any lower, we find they are spending over a quarter of a million on targeting primary school children along the route of HS2 for brainwashing. The concept of state-sponsored propaganda, which is tailored so children in communities impacted by HS2 must come to the conclusion HS2 is a brilliant idea, is truly Orwellian."

# Three hurt in van and car smash



The scene of the crash in West Bromwich Road, Walsall, involving a Transit Van and Honda Civic car

THREE men, including a pensioner in his 70s, were taken to hospital when a car and a van crashed in Walsall. Two of the men were taken to Sandwell General Hospital while the third was taken to Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Both the red Ford Transit van and silver Honda Civic involved in the crash were left with 'substantial damage'.

The driver of the Honda, who is in his 30s, was left with back, neck, chest, abdomen and arm injuries

after the accident on West Bromwich Road. He was treated at the scene and stabilised by ambulance crews before being taken off to Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital to be checked for a possible head injury.

His passenger, another man in his 30s, was left with a suspected fractured arm and other more minor injuries to his finger, neck and chest. He was given given pain relief before being taken to Sandwell General Hospital.

The driver of the Ford Transit

van, a man in his 70s, was being cared for by his family who were at the scene when West Midlands Ambulance staff arrived.

He was checked over by paramedics and after an assessment was found to have sustained chest pain as well as lower leg injuries. He too was given pain relief before being taken to Sandwell Hospital.

An ambulance service spokesman confirmed the crash caused 'substantial damage' to both the car and the van. The incident happened around 6.20pm last Tuesday.



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# Chase rail line misery could run until 2018

OVERCROWDING misery on the heavily criticised Chase Line could continue for the next two years, it has been revealed.

London Midland has said it will not increase the capacity on its line, which runs from Walsall to Cannock Chase, until 2018. The line has been dogged with problems in recent months, with the biggest criticism levelled at London Midland being the overcrowding on the trains.

Cannock Chase MP Amanda Milling has previously warned that if something is not done to address the overcrowding then there will be a 'serious accident or injury'. She added she was 'fearful for her safety' when travelling on an early morning service last month.

But the overcrowding could now be set to continue for another two years. In a letter to Walsall North MP David Winnick, a spokesman for London Midland said: "We have added hundreds of extra seats at peak times.

"Unfortunately, there is a national shortage of diesel trains so we can't get any more capacity until the introduction of electric services in 2018. The new service will be capable of carrying 50 per cent more passengers than our current diesel fleet."

The letter, which was penned by Letchford Midland's head of corporate affairs Francis Thomas, was in response to Mr Winnick writing to the company's chief executive raising residents' concerns over the line.

After receiving the reply he said: "I very much doubt whether the letter which I will be sending on to constituents who wrote to me will give them any satisfaction. All the indications seem to be that no improvement at all is likely for the reasons stated, namely the shortage of diesel trains."

# Safari park seeks 200 seasonal staff

A RECRUITMENT drive is being held by West Midlands Safari Park for 200 seasonal workers. A variety of roles are on offer including retail and admissions, food and beverages, games, venues, learning and wildlife.

The positions are for zero-hour contracts and the work will run from February 1 to November 5. A special recruitment day will be held at the park on January 8.

The event is being held in park's Treetops Pavilion and the day will consist of two parts. Candidates will be invited to explore the many opportunities on offer and speak to those who already work at the park to find out what life is like there.

Human resources officer, Zoe Croton, said: "The start of every season is a really exciting time at the safari park. We are delighted to be able to re-design our seasonal recruitment for 2017." For further information, and to register to take part in the jobs day, head online to visit the park's website at [www.wmsp.co.uk/careers](http://www.wmsp.co.uk/careers)

# Choir's festive song in aid of hospice



The Walsall choir Sing2gether

A CHRISTMAS song recorded by a Walsall choir is now on sale to raise money for St Giles Hospice.

This Time Of Year, performed by Sing2gether, is available to download from Amazon Music, Google Play or iTunes. The song was composed by Sing2gether's musician Stuart Crossen and choir vocal coach Mike Brereton, who is also a singer, songwriter and performer.

Sing2gether is a group of about 60 singers from two choirs, which rehearse separately in Pelsall and Streety and then come together for recordings and concerts. Mr Brereton said: "We do cover versions the majority of the time, but Stuart and I came up with the idea to create an original song for the choir to sing. We decided that a song with a theme of hope, strength and family would be ideal for Christmas."

"The message of the song is that we're here to support each other - that was really important to us. Many people join community choirs having experienced loss of loved ones as it gives them the opportunity to make new friends." The choirs started

learning the song in the summer and after just a few weeks of rehearsals recorded the track. More information is available by visiting the St Giles Hospice website [www.stgileshospice.com/](http://www.stgileshospice.com/)

People can hear the song performed live at Sing2gether's Christmas concert - which will also include plenty of festive songs to sing along to - on Friday December 16 from 7.30pm at Pelsall Community Centre.

Tickets are available from the Sing2gether website at [www.sing2gether.co.uk](http://www.sing2gether.co.uk) and donations to St Giles Hospice will be welcome on the night.

# Man followed home and attacked for cash

A WOMAN assaulted a 60-year-old man in his own home after following him back from a club and demanding he hand over cash.

Kelly Abbey, aged 35, approached Roy Williams as he left the Newton Club, in Darlaston Road, Darlaston.

She demanded money before reaching into his trousers pocket in a bid to snatch his wallet.

Mr Williams managed to escape and ran to his home where Abbey and another woman barged their way inside. Abbey then took cash from his wallet before fleeing.

Following her arrest Abbey told police Mr Williams had in fact assaulted her, that he had been drunk and she had helped him home.

But on the day of her trial at Wolverhampton Crown Court, Abbey pleaded guilty to charges of assault occasioning actual bodily harm and theft. The court heard she was in breach of a suspended sentence for another violent assault when she attacked Mr Williams on June 26. She was jailed for 13 months for the three offences.

## Pocket

Mr Julian Taylor, prosecuting, told the court Mr Williams had left the Newton Club at 7pm having drunk five or six pints.

He said: "Abbey went up to him and said 'I want some money off you' and he said he had none. She grabbed him around the neck and tried to get into his trouser pocket."

"Abbey said 'I am having everything in your wallet.' Mr Williams said 'I'll give you a tenner, now f\*\*\* off'."

Mr Williams broke free from the confrontation and ran off - but Abbey, of Phoenix Drive, Wednesbury, chased him and pushed him in the back and he fell to the ground.

He eventually made it to his flat where the two women followed him inside.

Mr Taylor added: "The defendant took £130 from his wallet and threw £20 behind the sofa. She put the rest in the bin."

"She then grabbed his glasses and threw them to the floor, leaving him disorientated."

Mr Tariq Shakoar, defending, said her past offending had centred on shoplifting and not violent incidents.

He added she had problems with drink which had contributed to the violent offences.

Judge Amjad Nawaz said: "You had no right to be in his house. Mercifully he had no serious injuries."

## Asylum shelter bid at ex-care home



The former Castlefort Grange care home in Castlefort Road, Walsall Wood

A FORMER care home closed down after failing to meet standards is now being used as a shelter for asylum seekers, it is claimed.

Planning permission for change of use of Castlefort Grange in Walsall Wood as a holding facility for single mothers with children who are applying for asylum was first filed last Wednesday. But residents have claimed people are already living there.

The building is being leased by security firm G4S, which has been contracted by the government to provide the facility.

Councillor Keith Sears, who represents Aldridge North and Walsall Wood, said he was worried the children living at the building on Castlefort Road would fill up a nearby primary school, denying local children a place.

Head of housing for G4S's immigration contracts, Juliet Halstead, said: "We have worked constructively with the council, police and other agencies to enable us to house vulnerable families with children at this property, which has not been changed or modified from its pre-existing structure, and as such we are hopeful that this planning application will be approved."

Castlefort Grange was shut down after failing to make improvements following warnings from regulators in 2013.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Record number of PPI claims on way

THE financial ombudsman expects to handle record numbers of payment protection insurance complaints next year as the fallout from the mis-selling scandal continues.

In its proposed plans and budget for 2017-18, the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS) anticipates it will resolve 360,000 PPI complaints during that year and it proposes to resource its operations based on these expected levels. The service has received 1.6 million complaints about PPI in total - and it still gets around 3,000 new complaints a week.

### MPs in line for a pay rise of 1.4pc

MPs are set for a 1.4 per cent pay rise - well above the one per cent cap imposed on public sector workers.

The rise from £74,962 to £76,011, due to take effect in April 2017, follows another cap-busting increase of 1.3 per cent earlier this year.

It comes two years after a 10 per cent hike from £67,000 to £74,000 in 2015, recommended by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. The announcement is likely to anger nurses, police and teachers, whose rises have been limited to a maximum one per cent for four years.

### Two thirds are on pricey tariffs

THREE quarters of British Gas customers are on the firm's most expensive tariff and could save £174 by switching, new Ofgem figures show.

Some 74 per cent of British Gas customers, or 6,639,056 households, are paying an average £1,044 a year for their energy, and could save £129 on a cheaper deal, the regulator's first company league table shows. The table compares the most expensive standard tariffs with the cheapest deals on the market.

### £250k target is set for addicts' charity

A BIRMINGHAM charity that helps people beat their addiction to drink and drugs has launched a new funding drive to secure £250,000 in the next 12 years. The announcement by Changes UK, based in Digbeth, Birmingham, was backed by TV star Russell Brand.

The charity wants to launch an additional CQC-registered detox facility in Birmingham, capable of helping 100 people every year. "Changing pain into purpose is the charity's strapline and I really like that," said Russell.

### Brum flights to Porto

AIRLINE Monarch has announced a new flight to Porto from Birmingham Airport. Flights to the Portuguese city start from April, and it joins Stockholm as new destinations.

Chief executive Paul Kehoe said: "We are sure it will be a popular summer route."

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## THE BEST OF PETER RHODES



MORE weather-forecast English. This week's warning was of "murky-mizzly."

A READER says she is disappointed to learn from this column that pansexuality has nothing to do with pans. She was working on her debut novel, Fifty Shades of Stew.

WHOPPERS of our time. I heard one pundit describe the brought-forward hike in council tax to pay for social care as "a temporary rise." Yeah, right.

BUT the council tax had to be the target, didn't it? Freezing it for several years had become a totem of Toryism, a buffer protecting the property-rich from the demands of Britain's uncontrollable welfare bill. The real hit will come when Westminster re-bands the nation's homes based on today's inflated values and the most desirable addresses will be in Much Weeping in the Shires.

THE curse of predictive texting. A friend and I provided ukulele-and-songs entertainment for a Christmas party under our performing names of Two Old Pluckers. We appeared in the programme as Two Old Plonkers. Our complaint was not upheld.

"EU leaders richly deserved Brexit and British voters were right to give them it." Historian and columnist Niall Ferguson, admitting he was wrong to argue against Brexit and is now relieved to be "back on the right side." There is plenty of time for all you other sinners to repent.



SO farewell, Ian McCaskill. I never interviewed the BBC weather forecaster, who recently died this week, but he suddenly appeared in the office in Broadcasting House many years ago where I was interviewing the chief forecaster, Bill Giles. McCaskill burst in like a busy little shrew, sorting through some papers while robustly denouncing some \*\*\*\*ing \*\*\*\* he had just fallen out with. It was all light-hearted but to hear the housewives' favourite effing and blinding like a navy was a bit of a shock. As I wrote at the time, it was like seeing the Pope spit.

OH, Yuletide foottide. I have invested in a pair of cargo trousers which are not only cheaper than jeans but harder-wearing and look much better on rumps of a certain age. They come with many pockets in which you can lose things. Some pairs have a special pouch for knee pads, which must be very useful when you're begging the kids not to put you in a home.

FIRST cracker of the season: "What happened to the hyena who swallowed an Oxo cube? He became a laughing stock." Ye Gods, another 10 days of this.

**Don't miss Peter Rhodes every Monday to Friday in your Express & Star**

# Warning on isolation for sufferers

LONELINESS and isolation can intensify more during the festive period than any other time of year, according to an Alzheimer's services manager.

Fresh research by Alzheimer's Society found that more than half of people affected by dementia find Christmas to be the most isolating time of the year, with many saying they are dreading the festivities.

Lee Allen, services manager at Alzheimer's Society in the Black Country, said: "While for many this time of year is full of excitement, we must not forget that dementia doesn't stop at Christmas and feelings such as isolation and confusion can be intensified during this time of year.

"Alzheimer's Society is here to support people affected by dementia

to cope in the lead up to Christmas.

"From not overloading the dinner plate to allocating a quiet room where people with dementia can find solace during busy times, our guidance on how to support people during the festive season will empower people to make small steps to have a better experience."

To support families affected by dementia this time of year, Alzheimer's

er's Society has created an infographic, which is available at - [www.alzheimers.org.uk/supportatchristmas](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/supportatchristmas).

The guidance includes introducing Christmas decorations gradually, spreading out family visits and designating one room in the house a 'quiet room' where the person with dementia can relax without loud noise is also recommended.

# Christmas boost with fall in jobless figures

Report by Simon Penfold

JOBLESS figures are down across the Black Country and Staffordshire, in a pre-Christmas boost for the region.

As the UK's unemployment rate fell to a 10-year low of 4.8 per cent the jobless stood at 1.62 million after a reduction of 16,000 in the three months to October.

Despite rises in many areas such as the East Midlands, East of England and the North West, the overall number was pulled down by falls in London, the South West and the North East.

In the West Midlands unemployment fell by 25,000 over the three months, to 151,000.

The UK now has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the EU - with only Germany and the Czech Republic having a lower figure.

And there was more good news for the region from the latest claimant count figures for November.

Across the West Midlands it was down by 1,790 to 81,790.

This was despite a UK wide increase of 2,000 in the claimant count last month, to 809,000 - the highest figure since February 2015.

The figures differ because not everyone who is classed as unemployed is eligible to claim benefits such as Jobseeker's Allowance.

And the West Midlands falls were reflected across the Black Country and south Staffordshire.

Jobcentre leader Samantha McLean, who is based in Smethwick, said the figures were a boost for the region ahead of the festive period. She said: "Most people are leaving unemployment quickly and finding jobs quickly which is good.

"At the moment there are quite a lot of part-time jobs out there to cater for people.

"We have also seen some large companies doing some very big recruitment, including Amazon taking on a lot of jobs for Christmas."

In Dudley the count was down by just 15 to 5,630, or 2.9 per cent of the borough's working population, but in Sandwell it fell by 110 to 7,115, or 3.6 per cent, and in Walsall it dropped by 125 to 4,825, or 2.9 per cent.

## Kind Kaiden coins it in to help school



Kaiden Babb, from Oak Meadow Primary, who started fundraising after hearing that his school had been burgled

A COIN-COLLECTING five-year-old has raised hundreds of pounds for his school after it was ransacked by burglars. On discovering 11 laptops had been stolen from Oak Meadow Primary School in Wolverhampton, pupil Kaiden Babb's first thought was that he wanted to do something to help.

With the help of his great-grandmother, Jean Balchin, the kind-hearted boy set about raising funds he could then hand to teachers. And his passion for collecting small change was to stand him in good stead with a total of £441 being raised. Ms Balchin, aged 63, said she was very proud of what Kaiden had done for his school. She said: "When he came home after the break-in he said he would like to help the school if he could. He likes

collecting one, two and five pence coins anyway and how he did it was to push envelopes through the doors down his street asking for donations. Some of my friends also agreed to put tins in the homes and whenever their neighbours came in they would leave some money."

Ms Balchin said she was blown away by people's generosity, with one anonymous donor contributing £50. She added: "Kaiden is only five but he is so loveable. He is a very thoughtful little boy."

Simon Arnold, headteacher, said: "As a whole school, from his classmates to his teacher to myself, we are extremely proud of Kaiden. This just demonstrates his caring nature and his thoughtfulness. The money he has raised will go towards replacing the lost items."

# Anger over decision on service to mark fallen

A COUNCILLOR has accused Walsall Council of 'discriminating' against residents in Moxley after they were left out of council plans to help cover traffic management funding for Remembrance Day events next year.

Councillor Paul Bott, who represents the Darlaston area, says himself and the people of Moxley were not consulted with over plans to help Royal British Legion groups with the cost of hiring private traffic management team to police roads so the parades can go ahead.

This is despite the area having a war memorial where 300 people gathered this year to mark Remembrance Sunday. A report went to Walsall Council's cabinet detailing plans to support independent parades to the tune of £1,000 next year.

Councillor Paul Bott, who represents the area, said he felt residents had been discriminated against, but Walsall Council claim that as a 'static event', the service in Moxley doesn't qualify for funding help.

Councillor Bott said: "Why is Walsall Council discriminating against Moxley's First World War memorial? Over three hundred people attended this service at Moxley Cenotaph. This memorial is in the middle of three major roads. The 98 soldiers that died in the first world war, they deserve this funding just like the rest."

"The traffic is that bad we never get two minutes silence with the traffic."

Parades across the Black Country were under threat after West Midlands Police said earlier this year it would no longer be providing officers for traffic management duties.

To ensure events were not disrupted this year, Walsall Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner agreed to share costs for traffic management and 10 parades successfully went ahead.

Council leader Councillor Sean Coughlan said: "The Remembrance at Moxley is well observed, but it is a static event just like Portobello in Wivenhall and doesn't include a parade."

## Victim of car crash dies in ambulance

A WOMAN has died and another was taken to hospital after two cars crashed at a busy junction in Aldridge.

The crash happened at the junction of Stubbers Green Road and Wharf Approach at around 7am last Thursday. Paramedics worked to treat a woman, believed to have been driving one of the cars involved, but she was pronounced dead en route to hospital. West Midlands Ambulance Service spokesman Murray MacGregor said the woman was in a very serious condition at the scene.

The driver of the other car, a 58-year-old woman, was complaining of right sided pain and was disorientated.

After treatment at the scene, she was taken to Walsall Manor Hospital for further assessment and treatment.

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## Plenty of dough for charity by West Brom

THE Walsall branch of a leading building society has raised more than £3,000 for charity after baking festive cakes.

Workers at the Bridge Street branch of the West Brom invited customers to join them for a slice of cake and a cup of tea or coffee.

The 'Tuck in for Teenage Cancer Trust' event was the latest to be held by the West Brom in aid of its nominated charity, with more than £25,000 now raised over the last eight months.

Jim King, the West Brom's communications manager, said: "The annual Christmas coffee and cake event is always extremely popular and a fantastic fundraiser – and 'Tuck In For Teenage Cancer Trust' was no different.

"We had staff in Christmas jumpers across our branches throughout the Midlands and everyone got in the festive spirit as we raised a fantastic sum of money.

"A huge thank you goes to all our customers for supporting this event and digging deep for such a superb charity."

Teenage Cancer Trust is the only UK charity dedicated to improving the quality of life and chances of survival for young people with cancer aged between 13 and 24.

Emily Henderson, regional fundraiser for Teenage Cancer Trust, said: "It was a brilliant event staged by the West Brom and heart-warming to see so many people joining in and donating money. We are extremely grateful for everyone's support."

## Youths no match for police dog

TWO teenagers were arrested thanks to tracking by Jax the police dog.

The boys, both aged 16, failed to stop for police in a white panel van they were driving. They had stolen the van in Bloxwich, Walsall. They dumped it in Hemlock Way, Cannock, before running away.

But Staffordshire Police's dog Jax quickly caught one of the teenagers and found the second hiding in a shed after half an hour of searching.

When police examined the van they found a quad bike which had been stolen during a burglary in Cannock. The youths were arrested on suspicion of burglary, theft, dangerous driving and taking a vehicle without the owner's consent. They were later released on bail pending further inquiries.

Dog handler PC Matt Butterworth said: "Jax did a brilliant job on the night. She caught the first offender quite quickly, but we were tracking for quite a while before we found the other one hiding in a shed. A dog's ability to sniff out offenders is highly developed. Quite a number of offenders just give up when they know the dog is after them. No wonder they call them land sharks."

The arrests happened on Tuesday, December 6.

# Treasured lodge wrecked by vandals



Paul Bott and Chris Bott at the lodge

VANDALS wrecked a treasured building in a park which has seen hundreds of thousands of pounds of investment ploughed into it over recent years.

Walsall Council has poured about £500,000 into improving George Rose Park in Darlaston and money has also gone into improving the park's Lodge building, which was left empty when thieves allegedly stole thousands of pounds worth of electrical equipment.

Councillor Paul Bott, who represents the Darlaston South ward, said it was demonstrative of a crimewave

in the area. He said: "It seems never ending. It seems like the police have abandoned this estate. It's a catalogue of anti-social behaviour. There is no police presence here at all."

He claimed the council had moved out of the building and that criminals had soon moved in.

He said of the Lodge: "It was a park keeper's house in George Rose Park and then it was vacated and it was completely run down. The council spent some money and the youth service went in there and they had amplifiers, disco equipment, PCs, lap-

tops. But (Walsall Council) vacated the building and all that was left open."

He said: "(The vandals) smashed all the front door in, took all the disco equipment and the laptops and the computers and they even urinated in the front room."

Last month a crackdown against arsonists was launched after firefighters were sent to tackle 40 incidents in Darlaston and Bentley in two months, with a chunk of them being deliberately started. There were two started in the park alone.

# Jail on hold for £26k benefits fraud woman

A FRAUDSTER who illegally claimed more than £26,000 in pension credit has been handed a suspended jail sentence.

Christine Bunn went undetected for four years as she received the cash from the public purse.

The 67-year-old didn't tell the authorities she owned two properties which meant she was not entitled to pension credit, a judge heard. Her deceit was discovered when the authorities became aware Bunn's husband jointly owned the houses and so began investigating her as a result. She had received a total of £26,373 in pension credit between 2010 and 2014.

Bunn, of Dorsett Road Terrace, Darlaston, made the claim following a turbulent few years in which her son died and her business collapsed, Wolverhampton Crown Court was told.

She had previously run a successful care company but had fallen on hard times when she applied for pension credit in July 2010, the court heard. The income-related benefit tops up pensioners' earnings for those who receive below £155.60 a week or £237.55 for a couple. But the two houses, which were described as modest, meant she had assets and so did not meet the criteria.

### Property

Mr Geoffrey Dann, prosecuting, said: "Mrs Bunn wasn't entitled to pension credit as she owned some property and did not declare it."

"She received payment over the years and at no stage declared the existence of that property," Mr Dann explained that when Bunn's husband was taking out a pension annuity he mentioned the properties, leading to an investigation that found they were jointly owned by the couple.

Oliver Woolhouse, defending, said Bunn had experienced a 'catalogue or tragic and difficult circumstances' before she made the claim. She has already begun paying back the money she received, the court heard.

Mr Woolhouse said: "She had a business in the care sector which had been successful but then went into liquidation in 2009. These were not vast, sprawling properties." Judge Michael Challinor said: "The harm done in this sort of case is to the taxpayer as they lose money."

Bunn pleaded guilty to making a false representation to obtain benefit at a previous hearing. She was given a six-month prison sentence, suspended for 18 months.

## Chapel site plans are thrown out



Willenhall residents concerned over Providence Chapel, with Councillor Diane Coughlan

A GOVERNMENT planning inspector has ruled against plans to turn a former chapel into a house of multiple occupation due to concerns it would increase crime in the area.

Walsall Council has declared the decision on Providence Chapel in Willenhall will be significant in ensuring developers behind similar applications provide clear plans around what will be done to manage tenant behaviour.

The iconic building on New Road dates back to 1879 although it had not been used as a chapel since 2008. In July the council rejected plans to turn it into a house of multiple occupation (HMO) accommodating 14 bedsits, due to concerns over increased parking, crime and the impact on two protected trees on the property.

Prospective developers Jamil and Anila Hashim appealed but now planning inspector Andrew

Owen has rejected the move. In his ruling he referred to a West Midlands Police survey which found that out of 337 HMOs in the region nearly 40 per cent of them were associated with crime.

Mr Owen said: "I consider these statistics are sufficiently compelling to suggest that, as a result of the development, the fear of crime or anti-social behaviour by the occupiers of nearby dwellings is not unreasonable."

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### New industrial units for estate

PLANS have been submitted for six new industrial units at a busy city trading estate.

A proposal is with the city council for the new units at Steelpark Way on the Steelpark Trading Estate in Wednesfield. They will also have ancillary office accommodation and parking for up to 110 cars.

The units have been earmarked for land which used to be part of a sewage treatment works before being converted for industrial use in the 90s.

Councillor Bhupinder Gakhal welcomed the development.

### Council tax rise is on way in budget

COUNCIL tax will rise by almost four per cent as part of Staffordshire County Council's 'most challenging budget to date'.

The move was revealed as the council announced its latest budget proposals. Bosses said they were ploughing more money than ever into social care overall.

The latest proposals would see the council try to save £3.4 million by keeping children out of its care system next year and a further £3.3m each year until 2021/22. Meanwhile, council tax will go up by 3.95 per cent.

### Software firm on the button

A WOLVERHAMPTON software company has bagged a prestigious award from global technology giant Microsoft.

Zeel Solutions, w0.hich is based on the Pendeford business park. It has received Microsoft gold-certified partner accreditation for its innovative software and service.

The company provides software to the recruitment and HR industry. The firms have to undergo technical and competency tests.

### Brum is voted worst place in UK to park

A POLL to find the worst place to park in the UK has put Birmingham top of the list. Insurance firm Privilege looked at the number of parking charges issued, length of time looking for a place and the frequency of parking-related damage.

Birmingham received a score of 228, Manchester 217, Cardiff 215, and London 204. Brummies typically experience parking-related damage to cars once every 19 months, with the UK average being once every 27 months.

### Summit on issues

WOMEN from different communities in Sandwell joined forces to bring families together and help tackle extremism and radicalisation. The Our Families Our Future meeting on November 28 at Tipton Muslim Community Centre addressed a range of safeguarding issues.

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IN MY VIEW  
with Mark Andrews

# Anyone got a spare library to give away?

THE Black Country Living Museum is looking for an unused former library to add to its open-air village. Something tells me that in the current climate they won't have to look too far to find one.

And there will be a nice art gallery and a few swimming pools available soon...

INTERESTINGLY, one of the reasons given by Dudley Council for closing swimming pools is the declining number of people who use them.

Now that I can well believe. Indeed, I used to be a regular user of the pool at Dudley Leisure Centre until 11 years ago or so, when I stopped going altogether. Why? Because they stopped opening to the general public in the evening, to accommodate a swimming club from another centre they had closed.

A POLL in our sister paper the Express & Star found that 75 per cent of readers think shops should be banned from opening on Boxing Day.

As something of a libertarian, I'm not a fan of banning many things. But then I think back to the days when I used to work Boxing Day, and the distraction of the inconsiderate shoppers who not only considered it their inalienable right to park on our office car park near a well-known shopping mall, but also to climb over the fence next to the window just to get to the shops more quickly.

Can you imagine how annoying that used to be? Does anybody really need to go shopping that badly?

Still if 75 per cent of the population want Boxing Day shopping banned, then maybe the shopping malls will be deserted on December 26. Either that, or our readers are far more sensible than the rest of the population.

The Football Association is "out of balance", filled with "elderly white men" and in desperate need of reform. So say four, er, elderly white men, who all used to be senior executives of the FA before stepping down for one reason or another.

Greg Dyke, David Bernstein, David Davies and Lord Triesman want the Government to step in and add impose a bit of diversity into the mix. Yippee, never mind Brexit, let's nationalise football.

I suspect if you did a straw poll of most fans about what is wrong with football, the main bugbears would probably revolve around there being too much money in the game, too much of it going to a cartel of half a dozen clubs dotted around London and the north-west, and the persistent under-achievement of the national team.

I bet not one of them would be calling for a task force headed by John Major or Gordon Brown.



The old Elephant & Castle pub in Wolverhampton



Gas Showroom, decorated for the Coronation in 1937



The site of the former Parish's Restaurant, West Bromwich

# Historic buildings to be talk of the town

£10m of Lottery funding could enable landmark buildings to find a new home at a popular attraction. **ROB COX** reports

**HISTORIC** buildings from across the region could resurrected at the Black Country Living Museum under multi-million pound plans to create a 1940-60s town.

Landmark community buildings, much-loved pubs and industrial sites are among those which have been targeted by bosses at the popular tourist attraction.

While some would be taken down brick-by-brick and then rebuilt at the Dudley site, others which no longer exist would be recreated using archive images and information.

The proposed attraction is reliant upon £10 million of Heritage Lottery funding and a bid has been submitted for the cash.

If successful work could begin in 2018 and 93 jobs would be created – with hundreds more while work is carried out.

## Demolition

Among the buildings identified for the 1940-60s town is Woodside Library in Stourbridge Road, Dudley, which has lain empty and boarded up since it was closed in 2008 under council cost-cutting measures.

Also being lined-up for 'translocation' is the West Bromwich Gas Showroom in the town's High Street, and the neighbouring Parish's Restaurant – both of which have been scheduled for demolition.

The showroom was badly damaged by a Blitz raid in 1940.

The Elephant & Castle pub in Wolverhampton was controversially demolished in 2001 but could be revived as a 1950s watering hole to inform visitors about changes in social attitudes towards drinking and social life.

A bowling green could also form part of the attraction, as could a brickworks modelled on



The Harris & Pearson building, in Brettell Lane, Brierley Hill

the former Harris & Pearson site in Quarry Bank. The museum's chief executive Andrew Lovett said he was excited about the proposed town, plans for which are the culmination of a major research project.

He said: "This would be a historic development centred on the 1940s through to the 1960 and which would include a town and also great industrial representation."

"The buildings we have identified would be clustered and we have had great fun designing the streetscape. When was the last time someone got to design a town in the Black Country?"

"We think we have got a very compelling bid for the funding but you have to recognise it is a very competitive environment in which we are seeking the money."

"The message I want to get across which has come about from consultations is about the amount of support we have had for the de-



Woodside Library, Dudley, is earmarked for 'translocation'

velopment from the people of the Black Country. It is hugely heartening for us. It is easy to forget and take that sort of thing for granted but it is a real boost to think we are doing the right thing."

Another building which has been identified for the town is William Griffin & Sons, a chain-making firm in Woods Lane, Cradley, which has also been earmarked for demolition by Sandwell Council.

It would be used to demonstrate the industry's move to merchandised production and the globalisation of trade during the post-war period.

But Mr Lovett said he was most excited by the prospect of relocating Woodside Library with action having being sought by campaigners for several years.

He added: "Having had discussion with the local authority we are aware there is a cove-

nant on that building from the Earl of Dudley who wanted it to be maintained for public use.

"So if that can be brought here it would be great and it would satisfy that covenant."

"It is a large and very striking building and is very much of the style we are after for what we want to create."

A decision on the funding will be made in the spring. If successful, the £10m would be used to create the town, a new visitor centre and car park, as well as the extension of the museum's tram line.

There are also plans to turn the current Rolfe Street Entrance Building into a new learning centre to enable the development of a new learning programme.

Mr Lovett said the scheme could create 93 jobs at the museum, 58 at other Black Country firms and around 450 while construction takes place.

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# A communist plot for racism?

I'm no conspiracy theorist, but when I constantly hear the term racist or xenophobia, I often wonder if these so-called cranks, who claim the plans for our current political turmoil were made long ago, are as misguided as we have been led to believe.

In 1912 Israel Cohen wrote a book on communist tactics entitled: A Racial Programme for the Twentieth Century; part of which ran as follows: "We must realise that our party's most powerful weapon is racial tension. By pounding into the consciousness of the dark races that for centuries they have been oppressed by the whites, we can mould them to our programme."

"The terms 'colonialism' and imperial-

ism' must be featured in our propaganda. In America we will aim for subtle victory.

"While inflaming the negro minority against the whites, we will endeavour to instil in the whites a guilt complex for exploiting the negroes. We will aid the negroes to rise in prominence in every walk of life in the professions and in the world of sport and entertainment. With this prestige the negroes will be able to intermarry with the whites and begin a process which will deliver America (and Britain) to its cause."

If that hasn't turned out to be prophetic, I don't know what has.

THOMAS PAINE  
Aldridge

## Shock over bench plan by council

AFTER reading the front page of today's paper (Wednesday) I'm shocked that a council which is considering closing the museum and libraries because of lack of funds, has spent £200 moving a bench to combat anti-social behaviour and drinking.

How is this supposed to stop it, they will just stand about or sit on the floor and what about disabled people like myself who after walking a little rely on seating to rest before we carry on walking? It could lead to lost custom in a dying town.

Here's a thought; how about we have actual police about to stop this and move them on as stated by Councillor Harbans Sarohi; they are the law enforcement.

I have seen many pensioners during summer sitting chatting on these benches that may be the only contact they have with others on some days. Why should the innocent suffer and lose out for an anti-social few.

KAREN COOPER  
Darlaston

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### POST

Walsall Chronicle,  
Chronicle Editorial,  
51-53 Queen Street  
Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

### EMAIL

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expressandstar.co.uk

Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

## New clear future is at hand for young

TIME after time, we see headlines about poor performance in our schools – are we still living in the stone age? Actually we live in the age of generating energy by nuclear fission, which has been synonymous with serious radioactive waste leaks.

Research into the new direction of nuclear fusion is now a proven capability, with a commercial operating unit actually being built in France.

It would provide an excess of usable energy above the operating level – the plasma stability issues having been resolved. Fusion is already known to be cleaner and cheaper than the fission process. With less harmful

emissions, it will mean the carbon dioxide presently being generated by fossil fuels, creating global warming, will be drastically reduced.

The effects will be life-changing, creating more opportunities for those with creative ideas, ideas which require logical thinking and the ability to communicate.

It is today's children at school, who will be providing that capability.

Those currently in charge of the administration and running operations of our schools have a responsibility to ensure schools can meet those future requirements.

RAY HAMMOND  
Aldridge

## Chief hits out at cuts criticism

IN a letter to The Guardian the deputy leader of Nottingham City Council, Councillor Graham Chapman, wrote that it was unfair to criticise Walsall Council for considering withdrawing funding for the New Art Gallery, as it was receiving less money from the Government than other councils.

How can Walsall Council justify more help when they are spending ridiculous amounts on temporary staff, and it wouldn't surprise me if this was just the tip of the money they waste?

The Guardian printed a letter of mine alongside that of Councillor Chapman. The thrust of the letters I have sent, has been that the gallery only appeals to a narrow elite and it is making no attempt to reach out to a broader spectrum of people, particularly youngsters.

I was shocked to read recently that Walsall has 569 homeless people who would definitely be grateful for a share of the money that is going to gallery. I will be going all out in the new year to help these people and I will be appealing to the council and local businesses to assist me.

ROGER WATTS  
Walsall

## Dog fighting is forgotten

UNFORTUNATELY for dogs, the RSPCA and PDFA do not seem to want to do anything positive about dog fighting. Shame upon them.

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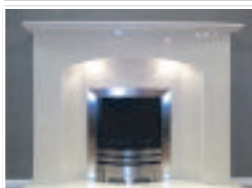
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# New look for Shire Oak pub following refurb

**A BLACK Country pub which was targeted by masked raiders earlier this year has re-opened after a refurbishment.**

The Shire Oak, on Lichfield Road, in Walsall Wood, Walsall, has re-opened under new management.

Alan Condon, who owns the Hen House, in Hednesford, and his son Daniel will run the pub.

Under previous owners the pub underwent an extensive refurbishment in 2015.

Then it closed suddenly in August this year without explanation.

It has since been sold and bought by Mr Condon. The Shire Oak reopened on November 25.

He said: "We know what we are doing and the Hen House is proof of this."

"Daniel has huge experience. I have been in the trade for 30 years and he has grown up with it. We want people to know that there is a good owner in the pub now."

"We have a large selection of ales and beers alongside a reasonably priced menu with traditional pub food."

## Headlines

Mr Condon added: "It was probably a couple of months in the making taking it over."

"It has had a bit of a refurb inside and out as well."

It is open midday until 11pm Sunday to Thursday and midday to midnight Friday and Saturday.

Food is served midday till 9pm Monday to Saturday and midday until 6pm on Sundays.

The Shire Oak hit the headlines earlier this year when hammer and baseball wielding burglars smashed their way into the pub.

They left less than 30 seconds later with a haul of cash.

A camera inside the pub caught two men using their weapons to force the main door causing glass debris to shatter across the floor.

The pair then kicked their way through and entered the ground floor of the premises.

They left after 25 seconds with a tray from the till containing an unknown amount of cash.

Both were wearing white or lightly coloured tracksuits with hoods covering their faces.

One of the men was holding a hammer and wearing white trainers and black gloves.

It is suspected that the pair fled from the area in a black MG car with no number plates.



Dan Condon, general manager of The Shire Oak, prepares to open doors to customers



Inside the Walsall Wood pub, following the refurbishment



The milestone premises based on Lichfield Road

## On the run to being one of the best

**RUNNERS** at Cannock Chase are bringing the area to national renown, after their exploits have made it the seventh most popular park fun in the country.

In the weekly event's first week, more than 550 people took part.

Runners meet every Saturday to complete a 5k run and have fitted four in since November 19.

Councillor Muriel Davis, portfolio leader for health and wellbeing at Cannock Chase Council, said: "What a fantastic accolade to be seventh in the country after just four weeks."

"I am delighted to see so many people taking part; men and women, young and old, people with children in pushchairs and even people with their dogs have been running whilst enjoying the beauty of Cannock Chase."

At another event, fundraisers donned Father Christmas suits and white beards to help raise money for the Beacon Centre and RNIB at the West Park park run on Sunday, December 4, in Wolverhampton.

Even pets joined in the festive fun at the park including a shih tzu named Oscar who was dressed in an elf costume.

The Santas could choose between a one mile and a 5km route, which was the equivalent of one and three circuits of the park respectively.

## Credit union aid for night shelter

A **COMMUNITY** bank is hoping its members will follow its example after pledging its support for a night shelter for homeless people in Wolverhampton.

Wolverhampton City Credit Union (WCCU) has made a donation of £250 to the city's Christmas appeal for a night shelter. It also hopes its nearly 8,000 members will donate cash or volunteer time for the shelter.

Lisa Summers of the WCCU said they had noticed a rise in the number of homeless: "Sometimes, people in this position will turn to the credit union for help, but since they often don't have ID, a legal requirement, we're limited in how we can help."

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# Homes plan for hospital site is nearer

A HOUSING development at the former Royal Hospital site in Wolverhampton has moved a step closer after plans were submitted for site works and remediation.

Years of uncertainty over the 12.5 acre site at Cleveland Road were brought to an end in March when it was sold to the Homes and Communities Agency by Tesco.

The development, which will predominantly be for residential and starter homes, may also see a new City of Wolverhampton College campus as different options are considered for the restoration of the listed hospital buildings.

Plans have been put in to cut and re-profile land around the main hospital building to the south and east.

The gardens and landscape area will be covered with 450mm of clean soil.

A spokesman for estate agents Cushman and Wakefield said: "It is intended that the site will be eventually developed for residential use and this will be subject to a separate planning application."

The development proposed comprises the remediation and levelling of the site. The site was sold by Tesco after plans for a £65 million superstore were dropped.

Black Country Chamber of Commerce president Ninder Johal believes the new housing will provide a welcome economic boost for the city.

He said: "Those looking to invest into the Black Country do take housing supply into account when they are looking at how strong a region is."

## Grant aids £20k repairs at listed church building

A CHURCH is to benefit from £20,000 of funding thanks to a charity. The National Churches Trust has pledged the money to St Mary & St John Roman Catholic Church, on Snow Hill, in Wolverhampton.

The trust is the UK's church repair and support charity and its funds will help preserve the Grade II listed building. It will also help to remove the church from the Historic England Heritage at Risk register. A total of 36 churches and chapels across the UK will receive grants from the trust.

Broadcaster Huw Edwards, vice-president of the trust said: "This funding will help ensure that this historic church, which does so much to help the community, continues to serve people for many years to come."

# Punters strike gold with football accumulators

## Cadet celebrations take off



As part of the 75th anniversary year Air Cadets 1290 Wednesfield Squadron, have had a balloon release of 75 balloons

AIR cadets looked to the sky as they celebrated the 75th anniversary of the organisation. The Wednesfield squadron of the Air Training Corps took part in a balloon release at a Christmas fair at the weekend.

The event was also about raising much needed funds for a minibus to ferry the cadets to activities around the country. The squadron share a bus with another group but this has caused problems.

Jonathan Francis, Squadron Commander at Wednesfield, said: "There was a very good turnout."

There were lots of locals there too,

cadets and their parents and local dignitaries.

"It was great that the Mayor of Wolverhampton could do the balloon release."

"We raised £700 and that now makes £1,400 overall because we did a bag pack a couple of weeks ago. Getting the money for the bus will make sure we can get more out of the organisation."

The balloon release saw 75 red, white and blue balloons launched into the air to mark the anniversary.

Mr Francis said the RAF cadets, formed in 1941, had a great past and a healthy looking future.

**FEELING lucky? Well Wolverhampton is one of the best places in the country to net yourself a jackpot on football accumulators, it has emerged.**

New figures show that the city is the fourth best place in the UK to place a low stake footballer accumulator and win big money – with one fan raking in more than £6,000 with a 60p bet at Ladbrokes.

The bet was placed at a shop in the city centre. Walsall narrowly missed out on the top 10, coming 12th on the list, with Dudley, Sandwell, Birmingham and Cannock all failing to make the top 20.

Stafford also failed to hit the top 20 but punters have still had success in the town, with one winning £1,974 from a £1 stake.

It isn't all good news for Wolves fans, however, as their team's poor run this season, including nine Championship losses, has meant Paul Lambert's side have been one of the most popular sides to bet against nationwide, according to Ladbrokes.

### Homework

A spokesman said: "Football fans in Wolverhampton must be doing their homework. Punters there are certainly faring better in the footballing stakes than their team, with accumulator aficionados in the city amongst some of the most successful in the country."

The report, compiled by Bonus Bet Codes, is based on the proportion of winning bets for more than £5,000.

Warrington, whose biggest winner was £15,345 from £15, was ranked top of the list, with Ellesmere Port in Cheshire coming second. The biggest win so far this season came in Barnet when one punter scooped a massive £34,387 from just a £2 stake.

One gambler in East Sussex coastal town Shoreham-by-Sea raked in £32,450 from a £5 bet on a 12-team accumulator.

Only one area with a Premier League team made the top 10 in the shape of Southampton, while only four of the top 10 locations have a football league team on their patch.



## Your Christmas Rubbish and Recycling arrangements 2016/17



### Changes to your grey and green bin collections

To help you cope with your extra rubbish over the Christmas period grey rubbish bins and green recycling bins will be **Emptied weekly From Monday 19 December 2016 until Friday 13 January 2017.**

Your collection day will not change

### If your collection day is Monday 26 December

There will be no rubbish or recycling collections on Monday 26 December. Your bins will be emptied on Monday 2 January.

### Additional waste

Because extra bin collections have been arranged we **WILL NOT** collect any additional bagged waste. Please take this to one of the two local tips (Household Waste Recycling Centres).

### Collections in the New Year

**From Monday 16 January 2017 grey and green bins will be emptied every other week.**

Please check your bin collection calendar or visit our website for your schedule for the New Year.

### Garden Waste

Garden waste collections stopped at the end of October for the winter months. They will recommence on Monday 3 April 2017. Brown bins may be emptied on a different day to grey and green bins. Your first collection dates for April 2017 are available on our website.

### Your local tips

Local tips (Household Waste Recycling Centres) will be closed on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day. Both sites will close at 4pm on Christmas Eve and New Years Eve.

### Winter weather

If we are unable to carry out the planned collections due to winter weather conditions we will keep you updated by local radio, our website, Facebook and Twitter. We will also leave a recorded message on our Contact Centre number 01922 653344.

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Fri 23 Dec	✗	✓
Sat 24 Dec	E	E
Sun 25 Dec	✗	✗
Mon 26 Dec	✗	✗
Tue 27 Dec	✓	✗
Wed 28 Dec	✓	✗
Thu 29 Dec	✓	✓
Fri 30 Dec	✗	✓
Sat 31 Dec	E	E
Sun 1 Jan	✗	✗
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# No 'silver bullet' to improve education' says MP after SATs

**HALF of Walsall's primary schools failed to meet the national benchmark for pupil achievement in SAT tests, according to Department for Education figures.**

Across the borough, 50 per cent of 11-year-old pupils reached the required levels in reading, writing and maths. The results left Walsall third out of the Black Country's local authorities. The borough also came joint 118th in the national league table.

Opposition Tory leader Councillor Mike Bird said the council had a difficult task on its hands to improve results at its primaries. "Although it is very much a case of much do better, there are difficulties in raising achievement in Walsall," he said.

"One successful way of doing this is to encourage schools that are doing well to share best practice with other schools. But there is a major problem in that for many of our youngsters, English is not their first language. It is often also the case that English is not spoken at home. There is no doubt that this makes it much harder for the schools.

## Improving

"We have to encourage parents to speak English to their children. There is no silver bullet for improving education in Walsall, but at the moment the results are not as good as they should be."

The most successful school in the borough under the new tests was St John's CofE Primary in Walsall Wood.

The school was 83 per cent of its 48 pupils who took the test achieve good results in the three main subjects of reading, writing and maths. Three schools posted results of 82 per cent.

They were St Michael's CofE Primary, in Maple Road, St Anne's Catholic Primary, in Blackwood Road, and Kings Hill Primary on Old Park Road, in Wednesbury.

## Report by Pete Madeley

Meanwhile school leaders across the region have blasted tough new exams for primary school pupils after results showed many local authorities fared far worse than in previous years.

Official figures from the Department for Education appear to show a drop in performance from 11 year old's taking SAT exams this year. But critics say the new curriculum, which many teachers argue is too hard, means the results cannot be compared with previous year's on a like-for-like basis.

A school is deemed to be above the floor standard if at least 65 per cent of pupils meet the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, or if the school satisfies separate pupil progress measures.

Across the Black Country and Staffordshire all five local authorities failed to meet the first criteria.

The general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, Russell Hobby, has dismissed the results. "This data is not worth the paper it is written on," he said.

"Delayed and obscure guidance, papers leaked online, mistakes in test papers and inconsistent moderation made this year unmanageable for school leaders, teachers, parents and pupils."

## MP Gavin cuts farm shop ribbon



Gavin Williamson gets ready to cut the ribbon at Essington Fruit Farm

MP Gavin Williamson unveiled a re-furnished shop and tea room at Essington Fruit Farm after 11 months of work.

Work has been ongoing since January to improve facilities at the shop and tea room, which boss Richard Simkin says has added a 'more professional and up-to-date' feel to the farm.

The official reopening ceremony at the farm, on Bognop Road, Essington, was held to coincide with Small Business Saturday. Customers and South Staffordshire MP Mr Williamson were invited to look at the changes. Mr Simkin said: "It has been a long task and we have been eagerly awaiting this day."

"To finally get everything finished and open to the public feels great, we can't wait to hear their feedback. I think what we have done is created a better, more modern and professional set-up. While the update has brought us into a more modern era, we still hold the same traditional farming values as ever before."

Mr Williamson said: "It was a fantastic visit and I was completely blown away by the transformation of the site."

"The cafe was absolutely wonderful and you could see the time, effort and investment which has gone into the farm shop."

Essington Farm is a family business run by the Simkin family who have farmed since 1892. Its restaurant opened in 1990, while the Butchery and Deli opened to the public in 2007. The kitchen cooks daily for the shop providing traditional home baking.

## Parking set to be split into long and short stay

A CAR park at the back of a shop will be split into long and short stay, as council chiefs look to revamp parking in a Staffordshire town.

Cannock Chase District Council's plans concern the Anglesey Street Co-op in Hednesford. Local authority bosses looked at Rugeley Road car park, which it part owns, but decided there were no opportunities to increase the parking there. And it came to the same conclusion about Hednesford Station car park.

Council papers said the Co-Op site is 'the best opportunity to increase the supply of long-stay parking capacity' in Hednesford.

The report prepared for the council's Cabinet, which approved the plans, said: "This is the largest of the three locations under consideration and currently provides 159 car parking spaces. It is already heavily used for both long-stay and short-stay parking purposes as a result of its location to the rear of the Co-op and its proximity to the railway station and Market Street."

The report added that it also serves as an 'unofficial' car park for commuters catching the train at Hednesford. It said: "The configuration of the car park was changed about 10 years ago, which increased capacity. There is an opportunity to increase capacity further if land currently owned by Network Rail could be acquired."

"However, the council does not have the resources necessary to undertake the purchase and it is unclear if Network Rail would be willing to dispose of it. Nevertheless, it is evident that it provides the best opportunity to increase the supply of long-stay parking capacity on council controlled car parks and should be considered on this basis."

The car park, which has 159 spaces, would be split roughly 60 for long-stay parking and 99 for short-stay parking.

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# Mother Goose raises funds for Laura's cause

A THEATRE group took their touring pantomime to a Staffordshire village to help raise funds in memory of a woman killed by a lorry driver.

Creative Stage Productions, based in Stafford, agreed to perform Mother Goose at Great Haywood's Village Hall free of charge. It meant all proceeds could go to supporting the Little Laura charity set up following the death of Laura Thomas in July 2013.

The 20-year-old teaching assistant was killed when her broken-down car was struck by an HGV on the A5 between Telford and Shrewsbury.

The performance on Saturday December 10 proved a great success with dozens turning up to join in the fun.

Through ticket sales and a particularly successful photo booth the event raised £619.36. Laura had been a teacher at Marshlands Special School where a garden is in the process of being made.

## Summer

The money raised from the pantomime evening will be put towards the project. Creative Stage Productions had previously raised £300 for the charity in the summer.

Speaking afterwards, Laura's mother, Lisa, said: "They contacted us saying they were doing 17 shows taking their pantomime on tour around schools and businesses.

They said if we provided the venue and sell the tickets then they would do the show for free.



From left, Silly Bill – Scott Bagnall, Pricilla the Goose – Ed Smith, Lisa Thomas (Laura's mother, and organiser of the charity), Mother Goose – Oliver Bennett



The audience at Great Haywood Village Hall where the panto took place

"So we hired the village hall and that is how it came about."

The Little Laura charity has previously donated funds to Marshlands School as well as Midlands Air Ambulance and Riding for the Disabled in Ingestre, where Laura volunteered.

Mrs Thomas, added: "The fundraising is a way for us to feed into some-

thing positive following Laura's death. She loved her work and absolutely adored the children."

The driver who killed Laura was looking at pictures of women on an explicit dating site while at the wheel. Her fiancé, Lewis Pagett, was seriously injured. Ian Glover, 44, of Birmingham, was jailed for five years.

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Philip Hammond's card, featuring his dogs, Rex and Oscar



Ian Austin's Christmas card, designed by Charleigh Finch of Bramford Primary School, Dudley



Gavin Williamson's card, by Amelie Moseley of Corbett CE Primary School



MP Mike Wood's card, designed by Maidensbridge Primary Schools pupil Alex Maher



John Spellar's card, given an extra bit of festive pizzazz thanks to Photoshop



Emma Reynolds' card, designed by Perry Hall Primary School pupil Kit Lewis

# MPs play their cards right for Christmas

FROM stunning images of Parliament, to schoolchildren's drawings and a pair of lovable pooches decked out in festive scarves – MPs have some novel ways of spreading the Christmas cheer.

While some politicians stick to the standard House of Commons issue cards, others run competitions among local school children which can last for months and garner hundreds of entries.

Gavin Williamson chose the latter route, despite having had a busier year than most having been appointed the Government's Chief Whip by Theresa May.

The winning design, by Amelie Moseley from Corbett CE Primary School, Bobbington, features a London bus, a snowman and the ubiquitous Elizabeth Tower, which houses Big Ben.

It will be sent out to around 700 people, although Mr Williamson is taking extra care not to forget his own parents as he did last year.

"I sent all the cards out but completely forgot to send my mum and dad one," he said.

"This year I'm determined to make sure everyone gets one, although I've already signed so many of them I feel like my right hand's about to fall off."

## Adorned

Labour's Emma Reynolds launched a competition for pupils at eight schools. Of the hundreds of entries the Wolverhampton North East MP picked a design by Kit Lewis, 10, who attends Perry Hall Primary School.

The card, which features a drawing of a Christmas tree adorned with a star, has been sent out to more than 600 people.

Ms Reynolds said: "I think the image is very striking. This was the biggest competition I have ever run and the standard of entries was the best yet."

Dudley North MP Ian Austin sends out hundreds of Christmas cards, with the Queen and the Prime Minister among the recipients.

After a contest among local school children that garnered hundreds of entries, Charleigh Finch of Bramford Primary School produced the winning design that adorns the front of his card.

The winning entry shows a Christmas scene with Santa flying over with Dudley Castle.

Mr Austin presented Charleigh with her chosen prize at a school assembly. He said: "It was a huge privilege to go to Bramford Primary and present her with an award for her design skills."

Runners up could choose from early Christmas gifts including a family ticket to Dudley Zoo and Castle, a family ticket to the Black Country Museum and gift vouchers for Hobbycraft.

Halesowen and Rowley Regis MP James Morris, who has been busy hitting the streets with the local Rotary club's charity sleigh, ran a contest among local school children for the sixth consecutive year and had 600 entries to sift through.

The winning card was designed by Year 6 pupil Ruby Field, from Our Lady & St Kenelm Primary School, Halesowen, and features a family gathering around a Christmas tree. Mr Morris



Aldridge-Brownhills MP Wendy Morton's card features a photograph of a wintery Pelsall Common with a gaggle of geese in the snow, taken by Steve Swain of Walsall Wood Camera Club



MP James Morris, with pupil Ruby Field and her winning design

said: "This is the fifth year that I have asked local primary schools to design my Christmas card and I am always impressed with the quality and variety of entries."

"Well done to Ruby and to the runners-up, as well as to everybody who sent in such fantastic entries, and a big thank you to all of the teachers and staff who encouraged their classes to take part."

Dudley South's Tory MP Mike Wood opened up his competition to pupils at all primary and special school pupils in his constituency.

And in a novel twist, he put the best seven entries up online for members of the public to vote on. The winner was Alex Maher, a Year 5 pupil at Maidensbridge Primary School, Wall Heath, who impressed the MP with his drawing of a Robin in a Santa hat. Warley MP

John Spellar got creative with his card this year. He used a picture of Elizabeth Tower, with a Christmas tree in the foreground, and enhanced it using Photoshop.

Aldridge-Brownhills MP Wendy Morton went with a local theme for her card. It features a photograph of a wintery Pelsall Common with a gaggle of geese wandering by through the snow.

The shot was taken by Steve Swain of Walsall Wood Camera Club, while Walsall North MP David Winnick has sent out one of the Commons' official selection cards chosen by the Commons Speaker John Bercow.

His colleague in Walsall South, Valerie Vaz, also picked a card with a parliamentary theme.

The shadow leader of the House of Commons' card features a photograph of a beau-



Another traditional Christmas card sent out by Pat McFadden and Valerie Vaz



Wolverhampton MP Rob Marris's traditional Christmas card

tifully decorated tree in Old Palace Yard with Elizabeth Tower in the background.

"It's such an iconic image," she said. "A lot of staff gave up a Sunday for free to put all the lights on the tree, which I think was a wonderful gesture."

Wolverhampton South East MP Pat McFadden sent the same card. He said: "It is a wonderful time of year, but it can get quite exhausting when you have about 700 cards to send."

Wolverhampton MP Rob Marris chose a striking image of the Houses of Parliament for his card.

Meanwhile Labour may have accused Philip Hammond of barking up the wrong tree with his Autumn Statement, but the Chancellor has shown he can bite back with an adorable card featuring his two mutts, Rex and Oscar.

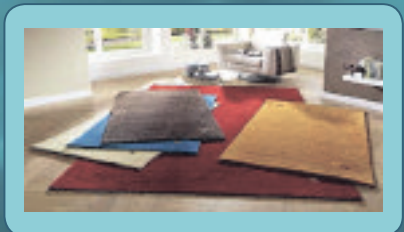
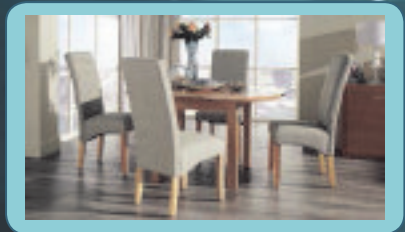




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Horse and carts adorn this street scene, of Lower High Street



The up-and-coming game of tennis soon caught on in Wednesbury



Cricket in Wednesbury was very much part of the town's social scene



Tony Highfield at Darlaston Library with the new book 'Ryder's Annual', highlighting the Black Country's past

# Book offers a glimpse of life in 19th century

IT has taken a year to put together, but now people have the chance to glimpse into the past and get their hands on a very special piece of Black Country history.

The Very Best of Ryder's Annual book has been put together by Bev Parker and Tony Highfield. The book features some of the stories and pictures from the well-known Ryder's Annual, that was first published in the 19th century.

The book charts Wednesbury's history from 1878 to 1918 and goes some way in illustrating the people of the town's contribution to the war effort.

Tony Highfield, aged 74, of Bloxwich revealed how he first came up with the idea for the book. He said: "I was walking down Darlaston High Street when a friend of mine, Joan Bythway, came up to me and said she had been given some old books for a jumble sale."

"She asked whether I'd like to see

## MEMORY LANE

Report by Jessica Labhart

them. I said I would and when I went round there and saw them, I couldn't believe it. The books were two extremely rare Ryder's Annuals.

"I asked if I could borrow them, which I was told I could, and then I spoke to Bev about them."

"We decided to begin putting a book together on the best of the annuals, and went and visited Wednesbury Library to look at their archive of annuals, too."

The book was launched on December 3 at Wednesbury Library then at Darlaston Library on December 10. Mindful Gifts CIC, based on Church Street, Darlaston, a not-for-profit organisation, is also sponsoring the book as it specialises in gifts and activities for people with dementia.

It is hoped that the book will provide an insight into the life and times of local people's ancestors. The book

also contains an almanac devoted to the First World War.

Mr Highfield said: "I just think it is so interesting to see the lives of the people in the book."

"People might be able to find their ancestors in there, old businesses, churches, groups, clubs and societies." In the introduction of the book, Bev Parker states: "The Ryder Annuals offer a unique insight into life in a successful and rapidly developing area. They feature images of the town's dignitaries, industrialists, councillors, photographs of the town centre and countless adverts describing Black Country businesses."

Mr Highfield added: "I always get people coming up to me saying they wish they'd spoken to their grandmothers and grandfathers about local history and their ancestors."

"What I'd say is, this book gives you an idea of what life was like back then, but do speak to granny, before it's too late, and share some of those memories and stories together."

The book costs £9.99.



Miners from Wednesbury on shift at a local colliery, seen in the cage which leads down the shaft

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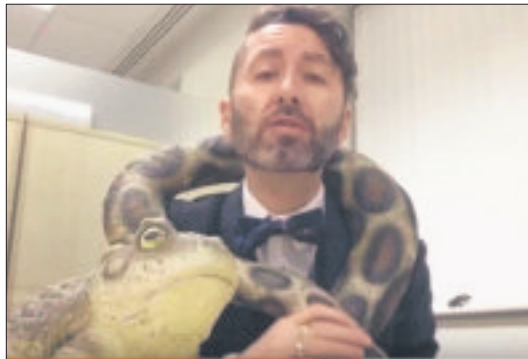
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# MPs in region backing fight against 'hard left'

## Avoid festive hiss-terics



Damian Carter, money advice expert for Bromford housing association, with his 'pets' as part of the latest video which is on Youtube

A MONEY advice expert has took to extremes by employing his 'pets' including a snake and lizard to encourage people to stick to their limits and avoid a financial Christmas hangover. Nationwide figures show that 12 per cent of people struggle to make ends meet at this time of year, with Christmas costing on average £750 per person.

The statistics from the Money Advice Trust has prompted Damian Carter, from Bromford housing association which owns 8,000 homes in Wolverhampton, the Black Country and Staffordshire, to create a quirky Youtube video to issue top tips to stay in control this festive period.

In it he dresses up in a tuxedo

while holding his pretend pet snake and lizard, while encouraging people not to splash too much cash on their own pets.

He said: "I think there is an expectation nowadays of gift giving at Christmas, but that gift being material rather than time for others or skill lending. Society, family and peer pressure can cause overspending and some people believe that a 'good' Christmas is measured by the number of gifts you get or give out. The key is to know your financial limit and stick to it."

"Christmas is meant to be 'the most wonderful time of the year' not the biggest stress of the year."

To see the video, visit [www.youtube.com/bromford](http://www.youtube.com/bromford)

LABOUR MPs in the Black Country have backed a fundraising campaign to combat the 'hard left' Momentum group, which they say is alienating voters and destroying the party's chances of gaining power.

The moderate Labour First pressure group was founded in the West Midlands and is supported by a number of the region's MPs, including deputy leader Tom Watson, Ian Austin and John Spellar.

The group is trying to raise £40,000 for a full-time organiser to fight Momentum, the ultra left wing group that supports Jeremy Corbyn.

Warley MP Mr Spellar said Labour First needed to go on the offensive to stop the rise of hard left groups that put up barriers between the party and the electorate.

"Momentum is making Labour look increasingly unattractive to ordinary voters," he said. We have seen this before with Tony Benn and the rise of the militants. That sent us into the wilderness for 18 years. We don't want to see that happen again."

Momentum was set up by Jon Lansman, who is director of operations on Mr Corbyn's successful 2015 leadership campaign.

The Labour leader has spoken regularly at the group's events, as have other senior MPs from the party including shadow chancellor John McDonnell and shadow home secretary Diane Abbott.

Membership of the group has risen dramatically over the last year and now stands at more than 20,000.

Mr Spellar said: "Momentum has got big organisation behind them, but as they have become more prominent Labour's ratings have plummeted."

"They are making Labour look increasingly unattractive to ordinary voters."

"There is need for someone to provide additional assistance, hence the fundraising campaign." So far around £15,000 has been raised.

# New social workers drive to cost £4m

CASH-STRAPPED Walsall Council is set to spend millions of pounds over the next two years as part of efforts to recruit dozens of new social workers.

Walsall Council, which needs to save £86 million over four years, wants to spend £3.8m in 2017/18 and £200,000 the year after recruiting the 40 new members of staff.

The recruitment drive is aimed at helping to reduce the average caseload for experienced social workers from 20 individual cases to 15 and from 15 to 12 for newly-qualified members of staff.

The council is also looking to reduce its agency spend on temporary social workers.

It hopes to claw back nearly £1m and is forecasted to save £494,000 next year, as well as £227,000 each year for the next two years.

## Hands-on

Carol Barton, who is head of safeguarding at the council, has said the authority wants to get social workers doing real social work.

Authority bosses also want any of their social workers to have a more manageable workload and, as a result, to have a better work-life balance.

She said that with a lower caseload, social workers

## Report by Jack Averty

will see children and families more frequently and be more hands-on than they might be at the moment.

Debbie Carter, assistant director for children's services at the council, said that the social worker move was part of a restorative approach.

"We are calling it a case-load promise. I think limit has quite negative connotations."

"It's reflective of the restorative approach. A promise is something important - you keep it," she said.

The council's proposed social worker investment is set to be included in its draft budget, which will be finalised next year.

The authority's recruitment drive is among a host of other proposed savings and investments which have been out for consultation for the public to have their say on.

## On red alert for deer little brekkie



The robin waiting for his breakfast, taken in the back garden of Diane Simpson in Willenhall

HE waits, perched on a Christmas reindeer, waiting for his breakfast on a frosty November morning.

This picture was perfectly captured by Diane Simpson in the back garden of her Willenhall home. The robin, one of two living in the 61-year-old's garden, is waiting for its meal of live worms to be served.

Mrs Simpson, who lives with husband, retired accountant Albert, in Stonehouse Avenue, used a Nikon D3200 to take the shot. She said: "It was a beautiful morning so I waited for the robin to arrive to take the picture - it came out very well."

Mrs Simpson feeds the robins every day. The reindeer was bought by Mrs Simpson several years ago from Wolverhampton.

She decorated it with a necklace with a bell and placed a berry on its nose. The two robins residing at her home are kept fed every morning by Mrs Simpson.

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# 16 Band of Black Country lads had 17 top 20 hits during career

The Chronicle Thursday, December 22, 2016



At the height of their fame, the foursome leaving for America



Slade later in their career in party mood



Fans meet Don at his first home on Green Park Road, Bilston



A new look after the band had left behind their skinhead days



Drummer Don Powell.

Pictures: Barry Plummer



Slade at Heathrow airport, ready to fly out in 1972



Glam rock personified, with Dave Hill's glittery look

## Slade come Bak 'Ome to celebrate 50 merry years

REPORT BY JORDAN HARRIS

**BLACK** Country glam rock and roll icons Slade returned to where it all began, to look back on 50 years of glory.

They are a band synonymous with good times whose energy-packed anthems still rattle with the same electricity as when they were first released.

Last Friday marked Slade's 50th anniversary, and to mark the milestone a show was held at The Robin 2, the live music venue in Bilston which has become the band's spiritual home over the years.

While the current Slade live experience might miss the inimitable howl of Noddy Holder on lead vocals, it has become a celebration of the band's spirit, which has always been one of its key features.

It certainly takes a lot of spirit for four young Black Country lads to visualise a life of Technicolor glam rock in front of them while rehearsing in Bilston.

But listening back to the early recordings, they prove they were hellbent on harnessing the escapist power of music in order to change their lives.

### Fashion

Once the band got its foot in the door, there was no stopping them.

Noddy Holder, Don Powell, Dave Hill and Jim Lea became household names, with songs such as Take Me Bak 'Ome and Mama Weer All Crazee Now taking them to the top of the charts.

However, it wasn't just the music that caught people's attention and sold millions of records. As the band racked up an incredible 17 consecutive top 20 hits, they became notorious for song title mis-spellings, the rock and roll attitude of its stars and a unique sense of fashion.

The greatest example of this is Noddy's famous mirrored top hat, a symbol of the excess and brashness of the times which no-one else would dare attempt to pull off.

Dave Hill also indulged with fashion excesses. He favoured silver and gold outfits with massive platform boots.

The band's best-selling single, and last number one, is the festive anthem Merry Xmas Everybody, which has become so attached to this time of year it is hard to imagine going through December without hearing it.

In a way, it is a perfect representation of the band at their peak, an unashamedly joyful song that reaches out to the masses with open arms. Their peak years were such a blaze of glory that it was inevitable that a dip would come and as the world around them changed and punk arrived in the 70s, their popularity began to fade.



The band at the height of their powers in the early 1970s when they were always in the charts and on Top of the Pops almost every week



In 2002 Slade received University of Wolverhampton fellowships



Noddy leading from the front as always with an outrageous tie

These are the times when a band's character is truly tested, after the fame and glory, without the energy of youth on their side and drained from years of touring and partying.

It wasn't long before they were back in the hearts and minds of the public, with a performance at Reading Festival in 1980 bringing Slade to a new audience. That would be done

again years later when Oasis shouted their appreciation for the band from the rooftops, even covering Cum On Feel The Noize.

Don released his autobiography Look Wot I Dun in 2013 and his childhood home at Bilston was chosen for a visit by fans at a Slade convention in 2015.

But last Friday's show was all about looking

back on the good times and the bad, reliving songs that are part of the Black Country's heritage, the fashion choices that continue to raise eyebrows and the connection Slade have built with their fans over the last five decades.

Nod and Jim no longer play with the band. They have been replaced by John Berry and Mal McNulty.

## Look wot you dun boys – nearly two million sales in the UK



In Flame, also their movie

**IN** the UK, the band has sold a certified 520,000 albums...

Beginnings as Ambrose Slade, 1969; **Play It Loud** 1970; **Slayed?** 1972; **Old New Borrowed and Blue** 1974; **Slade in Flame** 1974; **Nobody's Fools** 1976.

Whatever Happened to Slade 1977; **Return to Base** 1979; **We'll Bring the House Down** 1981; **Till Deaf Do Us Part** 1981.

The Amazing Kamikaze Syndrome 1983; **Crackers** – The Christmas Party Album 1985; **You Boyz Make Big Noize** 1987. **Keep on Rockin'** 1994 – as Slade II, re-released in 2002.

**Slade** sold a staggering 1.8 million singles...

1969, **Wild Winds Are Blowing**. 1970, **Shape of Things to Come, Know Who You Are**.

1971, **Get Down and Get with It, Coz I Luv You, Look Wot You Dun**.

1972, **Take Me Bak 'Ome, Mama Weer All Crazee Now, Gudbuy T'Jane**.

1973, **Cum On Feel the Noize, Skweeze Me, Pleeze Me, My Friend Stan, Merry Xmas Everybody**.

1974, **Everyday, The Bangin' Man, Far Far Away**. 1975, **How Does It Feel, Thanks for the**

**Memory, Wham Bam Thank You Mam, In for a Penny**.

1976, **Let's Call It Quits, Nobody's Fool**. 1977, **Gypsy Roadhog, Burning in the Heat of Love, My Baby Left Me**.

1978, **Give Us a Goal, Rock 'n' Roll Boler**.

1979, **Ginny, Ginny, I'm a Rocker, Sign of the Times, Okey Cokey**.

1981, **We'll Bring the House Down, Wheels Ain't Coming Down, Knuckle Sandwich Nancy, Lock Up Your Daughters**.

1982, **Ruby Red, Rock and Roll Preacher, And Now the Waltz C'est La Vie**.

1983, **My Oh My, Cum On Feel the Noize, re-issue**.

1984, **Run Runaway, Slam the Hammer Down, All Join Hands**.

1985, **7 Year Bitch, Mysterious Mister Jones, Little Sheila, Do You Believe in Miracles**.

1987, **Still the Same, That's What Friends Are For, You Boyz Make Big Noize, Ooh La La in LA, We Won't Give In**.

1988, **Let's Dance '88'**. 1998, **Merry Xmas Everybody '98 Remixed vs Flush**.

1991, **Radio Wall of Sound, Universe**. 2013, **Everyday, re-issue**.



One of Slade's biggest hits



# Single-minded plea by Vaz MP

A BLACK Country politician, who features on a tribute song to the murdered MP Jo Cox, is encouraging residents to buy the single which was released last Friday.

Valerie Vaz, the MP for Walsall North, sings alongside fellows MPs, Steve Harley, Ricky Wilson, KT Tunstall and David Gray on a cover of the Rolling Stones classic 'You Can't Always Get What You Want'. Parliamentary rock group MP4 also feature on the record, with member and Welsh MP Kevin Brennan organising the project.

All money raised through sales of the song will go to the Jo Cox Foundation.

Ms Vaz said: "I was one of a group of MPs from across the parties who took part. The project brought many people together and reflects Jo's belief that more unites us than separates us."

Mrs Cox, a mother-of-two, was attacked by white supremacist Thomas Mair just days before the EU referendum, after campaigning for the UK to remain.

# Bucket list hope Matt dies at 21 of cancer

AN 'inspirational' student from the Black Country who wanted to complete his bucket list before he passed away has died of bone cancer.

Matt Greenwood, aged 21, from Walsall, died on Sunday after being diagnosed with the terminal disease in October.

His friends launched a campaign to raise over £50,000 for him so he could complete the list - which included skydiving and road tripping around America.

Matt was originally given between six and nine months to live but the cancer spread from his hip to his lungs.

Matt's friend, Alec John Burns, who planned on shaving his head to raise money towards the bucket list, shared a touching tribute on social media.



Matt Greenwood

## Funniest

He said: "The passing of a hero and a dear friend. Matt Greenwood was the kindest, funniest and most spirited person I've ever had the good fortune to meet and I'm glad to have known him.

"He fought to the very end, and I think that perfectly summed him up. My heart goes out to his parents. I've never known a stronger and more supportive family, it isn't fair that such good people have

experienced such heartache. You will be sorely missed my friend, but you will live on through all of us. I love you buddy."

Matt was studying engineering at St Edmund Hall, Oxford.

Other dreams on his bucket list - which he had written out in pen as part of a 13 long list - include visiting Amsterdam, Harry Potter World, South America and learning to ride a bike again.

# Council to spend £4m on social worker recruits

CASH-STRAPPED Walsall Council is set to spend £4 million in the next two years recruiting dozens of new social workers. The authority, which needs to save £86m in four years, wants to spend £3.8m in 2017/18 and £200,000 the year after recruiting the 40 new workers.

Part of the recruitment drive is to help reduce the average caseloads for experienced social workers from 20 to 15 and from 15 to 12 for newly-qualified workers. It comes as the council is also looking to reduce its agency spend on temporary social workers. It hopes to save nearly £1m from this proposal. It has forecasted to save £494,000 next year as well as £227,000 each year for the next two years.

Speaking to The Guardian newspaper, Carol Barton, the head of safeguarding at the council, said: "We want to get social workers doing real social work. With a lower caseload, social workers will see children and families more frequently, they'll be more hands-on."

Debbie Carter, the assistant director for children's services at Walsall Council, added: "We're calling it a caseload promise. I think 'limit' has quite negative connotation's. It's reflective of the restorative approach. A promise is something important, you keep it."

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# Stocking up for seasonal fun over Christmas

## ANTIQUES AND COLLECTIBLES

with John Ridgway of Perry & Phillips



AT THIS time of year the antiques centre is always very busy with people on the hunt for festive gifts – but this year especially we have seen an increased demand for small vintage items, probably destined for Christmas stockings.

So I thought it might be timely to offer a few suggestions in terms of what is on offer for these busy seasonal shoppers.

Vintage gifts are always welcomed because they are so different to 'new' presents – and will show the buyer to have spent time, effort and money in their quest to find the perfect present!

Women are always easier to buy for than men, it seems, although we do see a number of male customers looking bemused.

So here are a few pointers.

Look out for little Victorian name brooches, silver pill boxes, tiny photograph frames, fans, lace gloves, pretty hat pins and powder compacts for starters.

All can be bought on a limited budget.

For a slightly larger Christmas stocking go for silver pin cushions in the shape of a lady's shoe, perfume bottles, vintage clutch bags and opera glasses.

And of course you could choose stocking fillers that would be useful in the home, such as small candle holders, candle snuffers, lace napkins and napkin-rings.



It might also be nice to buy a small piece of vintage china, such as a bud vase or an animal model that might remind someone of a favourite pet, you can find some lovely little creatures made by Whimsy and Beswick.

For men, the quest for the perfect vintage stocking filler might be a little more difficult – but by no means impossible.

We can start with small items of pop or sporting memorabilia and model cars, it is really nice to find a toy car that is a replica of a favourite vehicle and you can get these in mint condition complete with the original box.

Letter openers, vintage pens and inkwells, snuff boxes, cigarette cases (still popular although smoking isn't!), military medals and badges, compasses, magnifying glasses and vintage books?

All would make ideal stocking fillers for the men in your life and won't stretch your Christmas shopping budget too far!

In addition, you can find some lovely items of vintage jewellery for extremely reasonable prices.

Look out for Edwardian cufflinks and necklaces made from amber, jade and coral, plus rings and brooches featuring precious stones.

Happy hunting.

The Old Mill Antiques Centre is open seven days a week, from 10am until 4pm.

There is free parking and Charlie's Tea Rooms, at the Old Mill, Low Town, Bridgnorth, are open from 10am until 4pm every day.

# Something sparkly to brighten up your day



Make a statement with jewellery

SHIMMERING garments and metallic accessories are perfect for the Christmas and New Year parties, glittering like sweet wrappers. Bronze, silver, pewter, gold and copper can be seen in all our high-street retailers, beautiful shiny fabrics and trims glinting, persuading us to buy them.

I have just bought silver loafers, casual daywear but pure bling and a fabulous way to brighten my day. I love to wear them with jeans and a marl sweatshirt.

Mix the metals on garments, jewellery, bags and shoes and tone with deep black trousers or skirts to give a sleek, stylish and expensive look. Wear gold and neutral jacquards with soft fluffy knitwear, high shine liquid trousers with neat floaty camisoles and full sequin eveningwear.

A return to power dressing, but incredibly easy to wear.

Look on 'Asos' for coloured metallic bags such as turquoise and lilac.

Topshop have a great range of separates, gorgeous easy to wear styling, soft pastel super shiny lustrous fabrics. M&S offer an array of garments and Primark have foil gold

## STYLE FOCUS

with Janet Timmis



skirts for only £8. Some of the top designer names cost £1,000 upwards for a single item. Whatever your budget there is something delightful waiting to be snapped up.

The trend has been around for at least three years with the top catwalk designers showing molten metal classics and contemporary looks, glinting and shining.

### Shapely

Strictly Come Dancing costume department has used it to full effect to accentuate the diamondé and glittery finishes to spinning dresses but metallic fabrics have been around since the turn of the 20th century as the ultimate in evening wear, shapely clever body covering.

Nails follow suit with incredible mirrored finishes and glitter top coats.

Lustre finish eyeshadows and lipsticks bring make up and cosmetic looks in line with the overall trends.

Statement pieces enhance the effect in jewellery.

Long swaying fine earring chains, shiny floating pendulums and angular shaped body adornment.

Draping glittering collars and long precious metal necklaces, diamante and glittering wrist ornaments. Silver envelope clutches, gold rucksacks and metal trimmed purses with beaded detail complete the look.

Our houses too are benefitting from the theme with highlighted metal vases, shimmering rugs, chrome furniture and picture frames and bright glinting chandeliers and lighting aspects.

All that glitters though is not gold?

No, there are so many glittering options to delight us this bright autumn/winter.

Shimmer and shine this party season!

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Built-in wardrobes are worth considering



Go floor to ceiling for maximum space



Get organised in the kitchen with simple, stylish storage accessories

# Make some space with these simple solutions



Shelving is a must in small spaces

IF finding room for this year's Christmas presents seems impossible, check out these ideas for increasing your home's storage space.

1. One room where storage is essential is the bedroom, and while many of us dream of a walk-in wardrobe, most homes don't have space for one. The next best thing is built-in wardrobes, as they provide acres of space and are a more flexible storage solution than freestanding wardrobes. Fitted storage is particularly useful in awkwardly shaped rooms, such as loft bedrooms, where built-in wardrobes can make the most of the space, especially in the eaves. They are usually made to measure, so all the available space is used, and the interiors can be customised with drawers, shelves and hanging rails, etc. depending on your needs. The main downside is the price – fitted wardrobes typically cost thousands of pounds from a specialist company, although a carpenter will often make them for a lot less.

2. If your bedroom already has fitted wardrobes but the doors belong to another decade, simply replace them with more up-to-date ones (as long as the wardrobe interiors are fine). It's easy to get standard-sized or made-to-measure replacement wardrobe doors, especially online, giving you a great

By Julia Gray

new look for a fraction of the price of new wardrobes. Alternatively, get a carpenter to make new doors for you.

3. In the kitchen, lack of storage can drive you to distraction. A larder is ideal, but may not be an option in a small kitchen, where it's really important to have clever storage and a well-designed layout. Kitchen showrooms and DIY stores can offer ingenious ways of making more of the space, including pull-out worktops, pull-out shelves/racks in larder units, carousels so you can easily access the back of corner units, and tall wall units that provide extra storage in kitchens with higher ceilings.

4. Away from the kitchen, there's potential to create storage space all over the home. Ideas include turning an understairs space into a cupboard, window seats with built-in storage, stairs that contain drawers, a vanity unit for extra bathroom storage, and built-in bookshelves and cupboards in alcoves, even a desk. With a bespoke home office, the space can be tailor-made for your computer, printer, files and more.

5. Some of the best storage is, of course, your home's loft. If you need to access it often, fitting a large loft hatch with a built-in ladder will make it much easier. You'll also need to board the loft (if it's not

already boarded) before storing things up there. Use sheets of chipboard, or chipboard loft boards, which slot together. 'Soft' insulation (in rolls), such as mineral wool, shouldn't be compressed, though, so use loft legs to raise the floor level above the insulation – the recommended depth for mineral wool is 27cm. Another option is to lay rolls of insulation between the joists, but rigid insulation over them and chipboard on top – some rigid insulation has a chipboard top layer.

## PRODUCTS OF THE WEEK

Make a DIYer happy this Christmas with the Stanley Cushion Grip Screwdriver Set (£24.99 - Screwfix), 10 top-of-the-range cross-headed and flat-headed screwdrivers in different sizes. They have soft-grip handles for comfort and control, but smooth, domed ends for fast rotation. The magnetic tips make picking up screws easy, while the steel bars reduce the risk of the tips breaking. These screwdrivers come in a rigid carry case, so it's easy to keep them together and see if one is missing.

If you're trying to get someone into DIY in 2017, the Forge Steel General Hand Tool Kit (£29.99, Screwfix) is the perfect prez. This excellent 55-piece starter kit contains all the hand tools needed for everyday DIY and comes in a sturdy carry bag.



# 3,000 police recruit hopefuls

MORE than 3,000 people have applied for 1,150 jobs at West Midlands Police in its latest recruitment drive, it has been revealed. And a third of candidates are from black or ethnic minority backgrounds.

The force is recruiting 800 officers, 150 police community support officers (PCSOs) and 200 specialist staff over the next three years. The Labour Police and Crime Commissioner David Jamieson and Chief Constable Dave Thompson are keen to see the force's staff and officers reflect the ethnic

# Call for 'silent army' to receive council funding

A CALL has been made for a 'silent army' of volunteers to be given council funding, amid claims the sector isn't getting the recognition it deserves. Last year, £180,000 was allocated to Area Partnership Committees to tackle issues across Walsall.

Walsall Council agreed to set up the committees in May 2013, with six put together to work on issues raised by residents. In recent months, these have included the installation of CCTV cameras at fly-tipping hotspots, repair work to community buildings and funding for special community events.

## Home owner jumps to flee dryer blaze



The aftermath of the fire caused by a faulty tumble dryer

A HOME owner had to jump from a first floor window after a faulty tumble dryer has caused serious damage to a house in Bloxwich.

No injuries resulted from the fire on Heather Road as fire services were called out to the property yesterday morning at 9.20am, where three engines were called out to tackle the blaze. Fire crews from Bloxwich, Willenhall and Walsall attended, along with an ambulance and the police.

The fire is not being treated as suspicious at this stage. Willenhall Fire Station posted on Facebook: "The fire was caused by a faulty tumble dryer. Never leave your appliances unattended and ensure you are able to escape."

# Youngsters turned away due to referrals on rise

A PROJECT finding rooms for homeless young people has run out of places due to a soaring rise in referrals. The YMCA Black Country's Open Door Scheme project has provided 1,500 beds so far this year to vulnerable teenagers who are unable to live with their families.

But now the project has become so busy that young people are having to be turned away as there are not enough host families available to accommodate them.

Project manager Rachael Taylor said: "Our supported lodgings and night-stop schemes provide vulnerable young people with the stability that they need to continue their education. We urgently need more hosts in all areas of the Black Country to meet the growing demand for our service."

Ms Taylor met with Wolverhampton's South West MP Rob Marris who has ex-

pressed his support for the project. Mr Marris was interested to hear how young people need to engage in education or employment to get on the scheme, with dozens enrolling in university.

He said: "Sadly there is a growing problem of homelessness, particularly amongst young people. The main focus should be for the state to make sure there is sufficient accommodation, however in the meantime it falls to organisations like the YMCA to work with concerned citizens to bridge the gap."

The project also held its first Young People's Awards Ceremony at the Wolverhampton Council Chambers on December 7.

MP for Wolverhampton South East, Pat McFadden said: "The commitment offered by host families is really important and I hope more families come forward to take part."

Mr Thompson said: "The expression of interest from black and ethnic minority backgrounds is encouraging and we will see how the process progresses."

The starting salary for new officers will be £22,896, with a minimum of 22 days annual leave.

However, Councillor Doug James has said the committees are 'costly and ineffective' and has asked that the council give funding directly to voluntary groups who he says receive 'little support, recognition or encouragement' from the council.

He said: "In Darlaston we have skilled, talented, generous and hard-working volunteers that make a difference to many people's lives."

"These are friendly and generous local people who give hours and hours of free time to help our communities. We have a silent army of marvellous volunteers."

**Committees**

"It is disappointing to note how little support, recognition or encouragement our volunteers receive from Walsall Council."

"Money is allocated each year to Area Partnership Committees for local councillors to sit and pontificate on local voluntary sector needs. How many local people, let alone dedicated volunteers ever attend or know about Area Partnership Committees? Their funding should be given directly to the voluntary sector to run their services."

A spokesperson said: "Walsall Council supports the fantastic work done by volunteers within the borough and the difference they make to individuals and communities. The council is committed, with partners, to ensuring that a strong Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Organisation is in place."

makeup of the region. The force was criticised earlier this year when it was revealed just 13 per cent of new recruits were from minority backgrounds compared to 30 per cent of the regional population.

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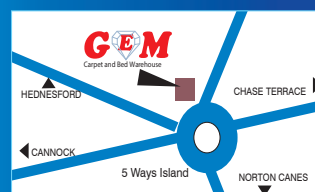
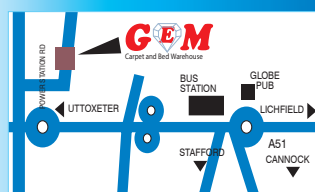
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# Oh baby! Just look how much you have grown

**HIS colour turned blue and he was frothing at the mouth, then tiny Joshua Taylor stopped breathing.**

Three-month-old Joshua was rushed into an intensive unit, while his mother Nicola prepared for the worst.

But the baby, born 13 weeks early weighing 2lb 2oz, survived and just weeks later he came home for the first time. Now, almost 18 years on, Joshua is preparing to mark his landmark birthday, a healthy young man.

His mother Nicola, aged 37, said: "I'm so proud of Joshua, he's shown the determination to battle through. But he's done more than that. He was the smallest in his class but then spurted in his growth."

**Pains**

Mrs Taylor grew up in Wolverhampton, meeting her husband Martin at the Venue in the city. The pair moved in together in Perton and then Coleridge Drive, Wolverhampton. And not long after Mrs Taylor fell pregnant.

"Everything was going fine until just before Christmas when I went to see the doctor over pains," she said.

"They said go to New Cross Hospital if the pains continue, but they went away until a few days later when I went to the hospital. It all happened so quick, and when he was born, Joshua was taken away straight away.

"I was then waiting for a call from the doctors to tell me he had deteriorated, but it never came and he kept improving."

Mrs Taylor continued to visit Joshua while he was kept in the neo-natal unit and then in another ward at the hospital. She said: "We went back one day and I was holding him.

He turned blue and began frothing around the mouth. My husband got the doctor who quickly took him away and rushed him into a room full of doctors.



Tiny Joshua Taylor was born 13 weeks early



Now Joshua Taylor, seen with his mum Nicola, is nearly 18

"He stopped breathing and it was a serious situation."

After Joshua came home, both Mr and Mrs Taylor received help from the hospital. When old enough, Joshua went to Berrybrook Primary School, and then Moreton Community School. And despite being behind his peers in terms of size, Joshua has caught up

with them, now 5ft 10in. Joshua said: "Going through what I went through and surviving makes me appreciate life and what I have. I feel very lucky."

Joshua is in his second year of a carpentry course at City of Wolverhampton College. He will celebrate his birthday on December 28 with his family.

# Blast-hit home is taking shape nearly one year on

**"EACH day brings us closer to moving back in."**

It's taken almost 12 months to get this far but finally the family whose home was wrecked by a gas blast is looking forward to moving back.

The property, on the Penn Road, Wolverhampton, was severely damaged by the explosion which destroyed their neighbour, Wendy Ayoub's house on December 28, 2015.

Now, the family home, which belongs to Daljit Uppal, aged 49, is on the road to being fully restored with builders hard at work to get the family moved back in.

Mr Uppal, who runs Uppal Sweet Centre, on Barcroft Road, said: "I do go into the house every day to see how it looks and how the work is going.

"Hiring consultants to manage the work was the best thing I ever did, as I now get updates every day on what's been done.

**Continue**

"Each day brings us closer to moving back in.

The family do not think however, that they will be able to move into the house until January next year, with redecoration still planned to continue into February.

Mr Uppal said: "It's taken a long time but I'd rather have everything done right than have the job rushed."

"We've had new underfloor heating put in, we're just waiting for the new tiles to arrive.

"Then we've got tilers at work in the en suite, the whole kitchen has been taken out and we've had an electrician come and put spotlights in.

"It's all bare, newly plastered walls at the moment, and obviously all the furniture had to come out. I've got some in storage and all the damaged



Months on and Daljit Uppal checks on the progress made on his home



**A view of what remains of Mr Uppal's neighbour's house after the blast**

stuff had to go, so we'll need to move in what we have left."

The exterior left side wall of the house had to be replaced following the blast. Mr Uppal said: "That wall has been totally rebuilt now, as has our utility room which was totally unsafe after the explosion.

"We've got central heating now, a new boiler fitted, so "E"Even though it's bare, it's getting to be more and more liveable each day.

"We can see how it's taking shape and I'm optimistic that we'll be able to move back in in the not too distant future."

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# Tips to help keep festive pot plants at their best

Hannah Stephenson offers tips on how to keep a festive favourite looking its best

POINSETTIAS are the symbol of Christmas, their traditional red bracts bringing festive cheer to the home – and now Poinsettias come in a range of colours, including light pinks and creams, which would complement more subtle decor.

Some six million plants are sold in the UK in just three weeks in the run-up to Christmas Day, with 80 per cent snapped up in the final shopping weekend, according to grower group the British Protected Ornamentals Association.

Caroline Marshall-Foster, editor of The Florist magazine, suggests an alternative way of decorating with poinsettia is to arrange a row of them in simple copper-coloured pots along the mantelpiece or the window-sill, or to dot a few potted poinsettias among lush green garlands of pine and spruce.

Celebrity florist Larry Walsh she says that using metallic-coloured containers can instantly add a hint of Christmas luxury to your poinsettia.

“A bit of sparkle makes Christmas. Accessorise your arrangement with gold-leafed candles and glassware and you have the perfect festive table decoration.”

Yet so often poinsettias wilt before the Christmas guests start arriving. So, how do you keep them going?

1. Make sure you buy a healthy plant whose roots are not spilling out through the base of the pot.

Check where it is located when you buy it because plants that have been stood outdoors a long time may fail.

Unwrap them as soon as you get them home.

2. Place them in a light spot, but not in direct sunlight.

If direct sunlight hits the plant, reposition it.

Poinsettias should be kept warm, ideally between 13-22C. Don't place them in draughts and avoid cool rooms.

3. The most common cause of failure is over-watering.

Let the upper half of the compost become dry before watering thoroughly.

This may mean letting the water drain away and then watering it again.

Don't let them stand in water.

4. Mist the leaves frequently as poinsettias (Euphorbia pulcherrima), which are native to Mexico and Central America, need moist air.

5. If your poinsettia starts to wilt and is as dry as a bone, soak the rootball in warm water, which may revive it.

As well as the traditional red varieties, you can also buy poinsettias in pink and white or with lighter green leaves. Try the stunning white Princetia 'Pure White', a new addition to the Thomson & Morgan range (£14.99, www.thompson-morgan.com) or



the popular cream type 'Regina'. If poinsettias just don't take your fancy and you'd like to try something new, alternatives include the Christmas cactus, hippeastrum and orchid. Two new orchids, Phalaenopsis Purple Princess – a dainty type with two to three flower spikes which produce a spray of 3-4cm mauve flowers - and Phalaenopsis 'Kleopatra 4' – which has cream flowers with intensely deep purple spots - have recently received the RHS Award of Garden Merit.

For more information on poinsettias, visit www.christmas-star.info

## BEST OF THE BUNCH – Holly

This evergreen shrub is another Christmas must-have, its bright berries adding festive cheer to a plethora of indoor decorations.

But it is also a valuable shrub in the garden and you can get unusual and more decorative varieties including variegated types with gold or silver-splashed green foliage, as well as types with yellow, orange or black berries.

Nearly all types are male or female, so you'll need one of each to ensure berries unless you have neighbours who also grow holly in close proximity in their garden.

The most popular type, Ilex aquifolium, is an upright shrub with 5-10cm long leaves. The male variety 'Golden Queen' offers green leaves with gold splashes, while the female 'Argentea Marginata' has white-edged leaves. Holly will thrive in any reasonable garden soil in full sun or partial shade. If you are growing holly as a hedge, trim it in spring.



Euonymus will grow in all sorts of soils in both sun and partial shade

# All-year shrub will bring colour to winter gardens

## BEST OF THE BUNCH – Euonymus

WHILE the deciduous varieties of euonymus, such as E. alatus, grown for its red autumn foliage, evergreen varieties of this shrub are invaluable, both to add all-year interest in the border and as a great contrasting feature in winter pots, alongside winter heathers, pansies and dwarf conifers.

Euonymus will grow in all sorts of soils in both sun and partial shade. Variegated types are the most noticeable, including E. japonicus 'Aureopictus', which has yellow leaves with a green rim and 'Ovatus Aureus', which has a yellow rim. As well as making great ground cover plants, some types can be used as climbers, clinging like ivy, such as the silver-edged variety E. fortunei 'Silver Queen', which reaches up to 3m (10ft) against a wall, while other tall-growing specimens can be used for hedging. Variegated types prefer full sun and little or no pruning is required.

## GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT - Windowsill herbs

YOUR herb garden may be looking a bit sorry for itself at this time of year, but you can still

have the fresh taste of herbs by growing some on your windowsill indoors.

If you have mint or chives in the garden, dig up some roots to force on a warm windowsill. Soon enough, they will start growing again. For a really easy life, buy pots of fresh herbs from the supermarket and they should keep growing if you water them and keep cutting them little and often. It's also easy to grow herbs indoors from seed, including annuals such as chervil, coriander, basil and parsley. Just sow them thinly in pots and let them grow.

## WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

:: Plant bare-root and container grown roses and transplant any established roses you want to reside.

:: Create an inexpensive hedge by taking hardwood cuttings and inserting them directly into the growing site.

:: Prune autumn-flowering shrubs over three years old as they finish flowering.

:: Drain surface pumps in the pond and have them serviced if necessary. Or else clean, dry and grease before storing.

# Planning ahead is sure to bring rich rewards

By Hannah Stephenson

**CREATING a vegetable patch, whether on a large piece of ground or within a smaller raised bed, can bring rich rewards if you plan carefully.**

Growing compatible crops together is likely to reap richer harvests, while not treading soil from one bed to another and keeping your tools clean between use will help keep soil healthy and reduce the likelihood of the spread of pests and diseases.

The idea behind crop rotation is that you avoid planting the same crop in the same bit of ground more than one year in four to stop root diseases building up and to make the most of resources such as manure, which is only needed for certain crops but not for others (like root crops).

Crops which can be grown together include legumes (peas and beans), comprising peas and broad, French and runner beans; the onion family, including garlic, leeks, onions, shallots and spring onions; roots and tubers, including carrots, parsnips, beetroot, potatoes and tomatoes; and brassicas (cabbage family), featuring Brussels sprouts, cabbages, Chinese greens, pak choi, radish, cauliflowers, swedes and turnips.

Green veg which require regular watering can be separated from less thirsty root crops, lettuces are often grown with cabbage family crops as they need organic matter, nitrogen fertiliser and regular watering.

Perennial veg like rhubarb and asparagus are best kept out of crop rotation beds.

## Nutrients

Squeeze quick-growing crops of lettuce and other salad leaves wherever they will fit, using them as a catch crop between slower-growing types such as winter brassicas.

By swapping the main groups of vegetables around in a regular order, you can make best use of the nutrients in the soil because different crops need different amounts of nutrients.

If you're starting a new plot or creating raised vegetable beds, prepare the ground thoroughly, digging to break up compacted soil and weeding thoroughly.

Then add bulky organic matter before planting season starts. It may be better to do this in spring, using compost as a surface mulch.

If you have an existing vegetable plot, dig it over each winter, inverting lumps of soil to bury annual weeds, but leave the clods intact. Frost and rain will break them down and leave a crumbly soil by spring.

On light, sandy soils, wait until spring before digging. Sandy soils may also need liming regularly to give them a neutral pH. If in doubt, buy a soil tester to test the pH of your soil.

The four-year rotation is a good technique which is easy to plan. Divide your plot into four separate sections if you have space, and then operate a four-year rotation on each.



The idea behind crop rotation is that you avoid planting the same crop in the same bit of ground more than one year in four



If you have an existing vegetable plot, dig it over each winter

A typical example might be:

**Year One**

Plot A - potatoes  
Plot B - onions and roots  
Plot C - pea family  
Plot D - Cabbage family

**Year Two**

Plot A - pea family  
Plot B - cabbage family  
Plot C - onions and roots  
Plot D - potatoes

**Year Three**

Plot A - cabbage family  
Plot B - onions and roots  
Plot C - potatoes  
Plot D - pea family

**Year Four**

Plot A - onions and roots  
Plot B - potatoes  
Plot C - pea family  
Plot D - cabbage family

On smaller plots, conventional crop rota-



Keeping tools clean will help keep soil healthy

tion is not practical, so just aim not to grow the same crop on the same patch of ground any more often than you need to.

Separate the main crop groups as far as possible.

Grow potatoes, onions and the cabbage family on a different area each year and fit other crops around them.

Keep a yearly plan as to what crops you have grown where – and you won't go far wrong.



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Ian Adams' superb Widow Twankey wore a succession of outrageous costumes that seemed to defy gravity



Most of the laughs come courtesy of Adam C Booth as Aladdin's brother, the accident-prone Wishee Washee

# Am yam ready? Panto fun wish has come true

**WHAT a Grand panto... oh yes it is! If you're looking for a festive feast of fun with magical music and tremendous tricks, then the Grand's genie of the lamp will make your wish come true.**

It is without doubt the Lichfield Street theatre's best seasonal show for years with a perfect balance of TV talent and seasoned stage performers.

And a star is born... she yam what she yam-yam but 'lazy' Doreen Tipton comes close to stealing the show as the Empress of China. Apparently she had to apply for the

Empress job to keep her benefits and was rather dismayed to get the gig.

Sometimes it means she has to get up before 2pm or miss the Jeremy Kyle show.

With a Black Country accent so thick it could plug the cut, she was an instant hit with panto-goers.

And I suspect Gill Jordan's comic creation will be in demand in panto land (at least in the West Midlands) for years to come.

Joe McDelderry is a suitably handsome and dashing Aladdin, and those who saw him on The X Factor, Popstar To Operastar or on stage in Joseph know he has an excellent singing voice.

Further fine vocals come from Britain's Got Talent fi-

nalist Lucy Kay as Princess Jasmine and Neal Wright as an American-accented Genie of the Lamp.

Most of the laughs come courtesy of Adam C Booth as Aladdin's brother, the accident-prone Wishee Washee, and Ian Adams' superb Widow Twankey.

The scene where the pair get shrunk in the wash was priceless. As Aladdin's washer woman mom, Adams wore a succession of outrageous costumes that seemed to defy gravity.

And all three of the Twankeys did defy gravity on a stunning magic carpet scene in which Aladdin loops the loop over the heads of a marvellous audience.

Stefan Pejic's Abanazar is an eminently hissable villain in the booming Tom Baker mode, gold-clad Lisa Riley makes for a wisecracking ballroom-dancing Slave of the Ring and CBeebies favourite Ben Faulks is the slapstick PC Ping Pong.

Add a troupe of energetic dancers and a soundtrack full of pop and showtune favourites, and you've got one Christmas cracker of a show.

It's on at the Grand until January 22.

**LEON BURAKOWSKI**



A star is born... she yam what she yam-yam but 'lazy' Doreen Tipton comes close to stealing the show as the Empress of China



Neal Wright as an American-accented Genie of the Lamp



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# Snowbody could better this duet

**THE Snowman returns to Birmingham Repertory Theatre in the New Year to delight young and old alike from January 11 to 15, with its wonderful mix of storytelling, spectacle, music and magic.**

For the first time this year the show will feature a new recording of the iconic song *Walking in the Air* in which the adult Aled Jones duets with his younger self, in a new arrangement by composer Howard Blake.

The new arrangement features on Aled's latest album *One Voice at Christmas*, which recently reached number one in the Classic FM charts, and will now also feature in *The Snowman* on stage.

Aled Jones said: "Walking in the Air caps off such a great year for me and I'm thrilled to give it a new lease of life. Who knows, maybe we'll get to the top of the Christmas chart again!"

Howard Blake said: "This is a unique theatrical event whereby through the wonders of technology one can hear Aled at the age of 12 singing with Aled as the tenor he is now. I am delighted that we can include it in the show."

Based on the book by Raymond Briggs and the film directed by Dianne Jackson, the stage show has transported generations of children and their families into the wintry world of a boy and his magical snowman.

The Birmingham Rep production features music and lyrics by Howard Blake performed by a live orchestra,



The Snowman at Birmingham Rep is a traditional wintertime family treat

choreography by Robert North, direction by Bill Alexander, design by Ruari Murchison and lighting by Tim Mitchell.

The enchanting show tells the story of a young boy's adventures when his snowman comes miraculously to life on Christmas Eve. Featuring a daz-

zling array of colourful characters including dancing penguins, magical reindeer, a beautiful snow princess, her wicked beau Jack Frost and of course, Father Christmas himself.

The Snowman is a Christmas treat for all the family and a perfect introduction to theatre for the very young.



## Fuller sound for Fall Girl

A SINGER-SONGWRITER has released her first self-produced album. Michelle Sciarrotta, who performs under the name Fall Girl, released debut album *Arcana* on digital platforms including iTunes, Spotify and Amazon this month.

She says the 11-track album, which was recorded, written and produced in her home studio, gave her a chance to experiment with different styles.

It acts as an expansion to her stripped back live sets, with songs she performs in front of audiences using just her voice and acoustic guitar fleshed out with keyboards, drums and more.

Michelle, originally from Coventry, said: "This has been the first major project I have put together on my own, which is something I have quite enjoyed. It is daunting, because there are times when you miss working with other people. But what you get is the clearest representation of the sound you want in your head, it is less of a committee thing."

### Record

Michelle is a classically-trained musician who makes her living from performing, not only as Fall Girl but under her own name with a covers set, as well as working with other musicians including former Wolfsbane rocker Blaze Bayley.

A launch event for physical copies of *Arcana* was held at record shop Vinyl & Vintage, on Cleveland Street in Wolverhampton. Michelle will play her final show of the year as Fall Girl on December 27 at The Jam House in Birmingham. For more information on Fall Girl, visit [www.facebook.com/fallgirlmusic](http://www.facebook.com/fallgirlmusic) or see [fallgirl.net](http://fallgirl.net)

### Make arena dates with rock legends

CLASSIC rock fans can add major gigs in Birmingham to their 2017 diaries. School's Out rocker Alice Cooper will be at the Barclaycard Arena on November 14 with The Mission and The Tubes. Before that, his shock rock rivals Kiss, fronted by Gene Simmons, play the Barclaycard Arena on May 8.

Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow are at the NEC Genting Arena on June 28 and his former colleagues bring Deep Purple to the Barclaycard Arena on November 17. The Who perform Tommy and more at the Barclaycard Arena April 12 and Black Sabbath say farewell at the Genting Arena on February 2 and 4.

### Osmonds join Brum festivities

JIMMY Osmond brings his brothers Merrill and Jay to Birmingham Town Hall on Friday in tribute to the late crooner Andy Williams, who launched The Osmonds with his Christmas Extravaganza TV shows.

The festive variety show will also feature Britain's Got Talent ventriloquist Steve Hewlett and singer Charlie Green.

Also on Friday night, singers Laura Tebbutt and Tim Howar join Capital Voices and London Concert Orchestra for White Christmas at the Symphony Hall. The same venue hosts Christmas By Candlelight with the Mozart Festival Orchestra on Christmas Eve afternoon.

### Musical nostalgia with tribute bands

GET the festivities going with the sounds of three decades ago with tribute act Kick Up The 80s at Bilston's Robin 2 venue on Friday. Or join The Upbeat Beatles for a Christmas Eve tribute to the Fab Four at the Robin on Saturday.

Also coming up at the Mount Pleasant venue are Thin Lizzy tribute Limehouse Lizzy on Boxing Day night, ska legends Bad Manners on Tuesday and The Dirty DC tribute to Aussie rockers AC/DC on Wednesday.

Turn the clock back to Madchester in the 90s for a triple tribute featuring Definitely Maybe, Adored and Happy Mondays on Thursday (Dec 29).






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CHOICE



**Shirley Bassey**

**David Walliams Celebrates Dame Shirley Bassey (BBC1, 9pm)**

They say that parody is the highest form of flattery. If that's the case, Shirley Bassey should be thrilled to bits by the way in which David Walliams and Matt Lucas paid homage to her during their late-1990s show *Rock Profiles* – Lucas played the great Dame as a diva claiming to have had more hits than she actually has. Not that the girl from Tiger Bay is exactly short of career-defining songs, having performed three 007 title numbers as well as plenty of other show-stopping tunes (her rendition of *Big Spender* remains definitive, for instance). She turns 80 in January, and to celebrate that landmark, she shares the stage with Walliams, one of her biggest fans.

BBC1

**6.00** Breakfast. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen. **11.30 Film:** A Christmas Carol. (2009) **1.00** BBC News: Weather. **1.15** Winter: Earth's Seasonal Secrets. **2.15 Film:** The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian. (2008) **4.30** Shrek the Halls. (R) **4.50 Film:** Penguins of Madagascar. (2014) **6.15** BBC News. **6.25** Regional Programme. **6.30** **Pointless Celebrities.** Alexander Armstrong and Richard Osman present a Christmas special of the general knowledge quiz, with Lesley Joseph, Duncan James, Faye Tozer, Bobby Davro and Joe Pasquale. **7.25** **Michael McIntyre's Big Christmas Show.** Michael puts a festive spin on his weekend variety entertainment show, with live performances by Alfie Boe, Michael Ball, Catherine Tate and Harry Enfield. **8.25** **EastEnders.** Phil is given some tough love by both Shirley and Denise, Linda receives devastating family news and Dot closes up for the final time. Donna is touched by a dinner invitation. **9.00** **David Walliams Celebrates Dame Shirley Bassey.** The comedy actor hosts this special evening of entertainment in which the veteran singer performs some of her best-loved songs and looks back on her 60 years in showbusiness. **10.05** **Peter Kay's Christmas Comedy Shuffle.** A festive collection of clips from the comedian's TV career, featuring highlights from *Car Share* and *Phoenix Nights*, as well as a seasonal singalong with Paul McCartney. **10.50** **The Vicar of Dibley.** Alice suggests an unconventional nativity play starring herself and Hugo as Mary and Joseph, and adds an extra touch of authenticity by going into labour mid-performance. (R) **11.30** BBC News: Weather; National Lottery Update. **11.45** **Midnight Mass: from St Chad's Birmingham.** The Most Rev Bernard Longley, Archbishop of Birmingham, leads a Christmas Eve Midnight Mass broadcast live from St Chad's Cathedral. **1.00 Film:** Surviving Christmas. (2004) **2.25** Weather for the Week Ahead. **2.30** BBC News.

BBC2

**6.15 Film:** Mars Needs Moms. (2011) Animated sci-fi adventure, with the voice of Seth Robert Dusky. **7.40** The NFL Show. (R) **8.10 Film:** Hans Christian Andersen. (1952) Musical, starring Danny Kaye. **10.00** Robot Wars. (R) **11.00** Wallace & Gromit: A Close Shave. (R) **11.30** Nigella's Christmas Kitchen. (R) **12.00** The Cook Who Changed Our Lives. (R) **1.00 Film:** Splash! (1984) Romantic fantasy comedy, with Tom Hanks and Daryl Hannah. **2.45** Snow Chick: A Penguin's Tale. (R) **3.45** Gorilla Family and Me. (R) **4.45** Gorilla Family and Me. (R) **5.45** Carols from King's. **7.00** **Dad's Army.** The platoon challenges a rival regiment to a gruelling duel, involving map-reading, initiative tests, river-crossing and field-fighting, to prove they are fitter and better trained than any other troop. Vintage comedy with the bumbling Home Guard of Walmington-on-Sea, starring Arthur Lowe, John Le Mesurier and Ian Lavender. (R) **8.00** **Alan Bennett's Diaries.** A candid profile of the writer, following him in his home village in Yorkshire, to his community library in Primrose Hill and during a trip to New York. In a series of intimate encounters filmed over the period of a year, he reflects on his modest beginnings and his enduring gratitude to a Welfare State that paid for his education and looked after his parents in their old age. **9.00** **Film: The Lady in the Van.** (2015) Premiere. The true story of writer Alan Bennett's friendship with an eccentric homeless woman, whom he befriended in the 1970s before allowing her to park her dilapidated Bedford van outside his Camden home, where she ended up staying for 15 years. Comedy-drama, starring Maggie Smith, Alec Jennings, Roger Allam and Jim Broadbent. **10.40** **The National Lottery Live.** The all-important winning numbers are revealed. **10.50** **Christmas TOTP2 Special.** Mark Radcliffe presents festive performances from the Top of the Pops archive, including classics by Slade, Wham!, Wizard, East 17, Mud, the Jackson 5 and Johnny Mathis. (R) **12.20 Film:** Viva Las Vegas. (1964) **1.40** Sign Zone: Countryfile. (R) **2.40** Holby City. (R) **3.40** This Is BBC Two. Preview of upcoming programmes.

ITV

**6.00** CITV: Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. **6.20** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.45** Super 4. (R) **6.55** Signed Stories. (R) **7.05** Sooty. (R) **7.10** Oddbods. (R) **7.15** Oddbods. (R) **7.25** Nerds & Monsters. (R) **7.40** Nerds & Monsters. (R) **7.55** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.10** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.25** Weekend at Christmas. **9.25** Thunderbirds Are Go. **9.50** The Chase. (R) **10.50** You've Been Framed! With Bells On. (R) **11.20 Film:** Despicable Me. (2010) **1.20** ITV News: Weather. **1.30 Film:** Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. (2001) Fantasy adventure, starring Daniel Radcliffe. **4.20** **Film:** One Hundred and One Dalmatians. (1961) Disney animated adventure, with the voice of Betty Lou Gerson. **6.00** Regional Programme: Weather. **6.15** ITV News: Weather. **6.30** **Blankety Blank.** David Walliams presents a one-off special revival of the 1970s game show in which contestants and a panel of celebrities must identify the missing word in a phrase. **7.30** **Coronation Street.** Aidan admits to Johnny he is in love with Maria while she heads to court, and Nick feels left out as Peter and Leanne reflect on old times. **8.00** **Birds of a Feather.** Sharon, Tracey and Dorian head to Morocco to track down Travis when he goes missing while on his gap year. Comedy, starring Pauline Quirke, Linda Robson and Lesley Joseph. **9.00** **Granthamchester Christmas Special.** It's the week before Christmas, and Sidney and Georgie are drawn into a case with echoes of an unsolved murder from nine years previously when a bride-to-be reports the disappearance of her groom on their wedding day. Drama set in the 1950s, starring James Norton, Robson Green, Morven Christie and Al Weaver. **10.30** **Through the Keyhole.** Keith Lemon hosts a Christmas special of the game show, as celebrity panellists Shayne Ward, Kelly Brook and Johnny Vegas are asked to identify the homes of the rich and famous. **11.30** ITV News: Weather. **11.45** **Christmas Carols on TV.** Aled Jones joins the congregation of St Chad's church in Rochdale. **12.40** All Star Mr & Mrs Christmas Special. (R) **1.30 Film:** Carry On Loving. (1970) **3.05** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

**6.15** Olive, the Other Reindeer. (R) **7.05** **Film:** A Turtle's Tale: Sammy's Adventures. (2010) **8.40** Father Christmas. (R) **9.10** Painting the Bear Hunt. **9.15** Christmas Brunch. **9.20** Jamie's Ultimate Christmas. (R) **1.15** The Simpsons. (R) **1.45** The Simpsons. (R) **2.15** The Simpsons. (R) **2.45** **Film:** Scrooged. (1988) Christmas comedy, starring Bill Murray. **4.40** Channel 4 News. **4.45** The Snowman. (R) **5.15** The Snowman and the Snowdog. (R) **5.50** **Film:** The Muppet Christmas Carol. (1992) Puppet comedy, starring Michael Caine. **7.30** **We're Going on a Bear Hunt.** Animated adventure, based on Michael Rosen's popular children's story of the same name, featuring the voices of Olivia Colman, Pam Ferris and Mark Williams. **8.00** **Gogglesprogs Christmas Special.** Young TV viewers appraise the year's television programmes in this festive edition, from big news stories about the American Presidential election to TV's most popular hits, including Strictly Come Dancing, First Dates and Planet Earth II. **9.00** **8 Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown Christmas Special.** Jimmy Carr hosts a festive edition of the comedy panel show, with guests Kathy Burke and Russell Howard joining Sean Lock and Jon Richardson. With Joe Lycett and Joe Wilkinson. **10.00** **Rude Tube Christmas Cracker 2016.** Alex Zane and his canine companion Bah Hum-Pug present some of the most popular seasonal internet videos, including a rocket-powered reindeer and a Christmas message from Björk. **11.00** **Tringer Happy Christmas Special.** Don't Joly returns with a festive edition of the hidden-camera show, featuring new characters alongside the "big mobile man", who now has a smartphone with apps and video-calling. **11.30** **The Inbetweeners.** The gang goes on the infamous sociology and geography field trip to Swanage, and Will takes a shine to new girl Lauren – but she is only interested in Simon. (R) **12.05** The Inbetweeners. (R) **1.30** Friday Night Dinner. (R) **2.25** The Last Leg Christmas Special. (R) **3.20** My Crazy Christmas Lights. (R) **4.10** Location, Location, Location. (R) **5.05** The Restoration Man. (R) **5.55** Prep & Landing. (R)

CHANNEL 5

**6.00** Milkshake! **8.30** SpongeBob SquarePants. **9.05** **Film:** Doctor Zhivago. (1965) **12.50** **Film:** The Vikings. (1958) Historical adventure, starring Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis. **3.05** **Film:** Jason and the Argonauts. (1963) Fantasy adventure, starring Todd Armstrong. **5.10** **Film:** Scroogie – A Christmas Carol. (1951) Charles Dickens' fantasy, starring Alastair Sim. **6.55** **Andre Rieu: Christmas in London.** A festive concert given by the Dutch violinist and the Johann Strauss Orchestra in 2015, featuring Christmas carols, popular classical pieces and songs including Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah and the Concerto de Aranjuez. **8.00** **The Yorkshire Vet at Christmas.** The veterinary documentary series concludes with a festive trip to Skeldale. Elderly farmer Jean, one of the show's most colourful characters, makes a Christmas cake with ingredients that have been "maturing" for seven years, and vet Peter Wright fears the worst when he is called to tend to a cow that has collapsed. Back at the surgery, Julian Norton has to make a difficult decision regarding Barney, a spaniel with a huge, fast-growing tumour on his leg. The residents of Thirsk plan to mark James Herriot's centenary by inviting his successors to turn on the town's Christmas lights, but Julian and Peter face a more daunting challenge when they are asked to help find a donkey for the town square nativity scene. Last in the series. **9.00** **Eamonn & Ruth: A Million Pound Christmas.** Eamonn Holmes and Ruth Langford discover the most expensive ways in which people can enjoy the season of goodwill, beginning by sampling a £10,000 advent calendar. **10.00** **Greatest Ever Christmas Movies.** Countdown of the best festive films, from It's a Wonderful Life to Bad Santa. Featuring contributions by Gremlins star Zach Galligan and Miracle on 34th Street's Mara Wilson. (R) **12.55** **Film:** Scroogie – A Christmas Carol. (1951) **2.25** SuperCasino. **4.00** The Trafford Centre: Countdown to Christmas. (R) **4.50** House Doctor. (R) **5.20** Angels of Jarm. (R) **5.25** Roary the Racing Car. (R) **5.35** Milkshake! Bop Box. (R) **5.40** Peppa Pig. (R) **5.45** Paw Patrol.

DIGITAL

**BBC Four** **7.00** All Aboard! The Sleigh Ride **9.00** Top of the Pops Christmas Hits **10.30** Roy Orbison: One of the Lonely Ones **11.30** Steptoe and Son **12.15** Top of the Pops: 1982 **1.25** Shirley Bassey at the BBC **2.25** Top of the Pops **3.55** Close **ITV2** **11.50** The Nation's Favourite Disney Song **12.50** **Film:** Santa Paws 2: The Santa Pups (2012) **2.35** **Film:** Mickey's Twice Upon a Christmas (2004) **4.25** The Smurfs: A Christmas Carol **4.25** You've Been Framed! at Christmas **5.25** Catchphrase Christmas Special **6.30** You've Been Framed! at Christmas **6.55** **Film:** The Polar Express (2004) **9.00** **Film:** Quantum of Solace (2008) **11.15** Family Guy **12.15** American Dad! **1.40** Celebrity Juice Christmas Special **2.35** **Film:** Derailed (2005) **4.20** Educating Jess: What Are You Sleighing? **5.05** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records **5.30** Christmas Bonkers Guinness World Records **5.55** ITV2 Nightscreen **ITV3** **11.45** **Film:** Columbo: The Conspirators (1978) **1.50** Hans Christian Andersen: My Life as a Fairy Tale **3.50** The Sound of Music Live! **6.30** The Making of The Sound of Music Live **7.00** Lewis **9.00** It'll Be Alright on the Night **10.00** Midsomer Murders: A Night to Remember **11.00** The Suspicions of Mr Whicher **1.05** Inspector Morse **3.00** Hans Christian Andersen: My Life as a Fairy Tale **4.40** The Darling Buds of May **5.35** ITV3 Nightscreen **ITV4** **12.10** **Film:** The Searchers (1956) **1.20** FYI Daily **1.25** **Film:** The Searchers (1956) **2.30** **Film:** The Horse Soldiers (1959) **5.00** **Film:** Rio Bravo (1959) **7.50** **Film:** Cannonball Run II (1984) **10.00** **Film:** The Devil's Advocate (1997) **11.50** **Film:** Road (2014) **3.00** Hell on Wheels **3.45** ITV4 Nightscreen **3.50** Tommy Cooper **4.15** The Professionals **5.10** Minder **E4** **11.55** **Film:** Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules (2011) **2.00** Father Christmas **2.35** Prep & Landing **3.00** Prep & Landing: Naughty v Nice **3.25** The Big Bang Theory **9.00** **Film:** The Inbetweeners Movie (2011) **11.05** Gogglebox **1.10** Rude Tube Christmas Cracker **2014** **2.15** Rude Tube **3.20** Rude Tube Christmas Cracker **4.10** Made in Chelsea Christmas **5.00** Melissa & Joey **Film4** **11.00** Miracle on 34th Street (1994) **1.15** Arthur Christmas (2011) **3.15** Mr Popper's Penguins (2011) **5.05** Thunderbirds (2004) **6.50** Knight and Day (2010) **9.00** Last Vegas (2013) **11.10** The Transporter (2002) **12.55** Rear Window (1954) **3.15** Close

eating out



Hot dog with a difference – Mac and Cheese Dog



Burger Priest in busy spot in Wolverhampton city centre



Are you sitting comfortably – variety of seating choices



High Priest Burger – one of the many choices

Praise be! It's a Priestly burger

**IN** the beginning, there was the burger, and the burger was. . . well, not very good.

It's fair to say that it has taken the UK some time to master the hamburger. Once the only options you were McDonalds, Wimpy, and the kind of hot food vans you get at Wolves matches.

Not exactly an embarrassment of riches. Eventually Burger King came along and upped the burger game somewhat.

Then The Gourmet Burger Kitchen arrived and changed all that, reasoning that if you were going to be a burger chain, then people might be willing to pay a bit more money and come back for more if the burgers were, you know, actually half-decent.

And so burgers got posh. Rather than the embarrassingly perfunctory slabs of meat and processed cheese on offer at high street fast food establishments, you now get things like dry-aged steak, smoked Applewood cheese, onion jam, truffle mayonnaise and avocado.

The success of Gourmet Burger Kitchen proved that there was a market for Fancy

**Pete Cashmore tucks in**

Dan poshburgers, and indeed the subsequent rise of Five Guys, of which there are two in Birmingham, proved that you could apply the posh burger ethos to a fast food environment and make it work.

Any city worth its salt has at least one posh burger joint in its midst, and it was with this in mind that, a few months back, Wolverhampton welcomed Burger Priest.

How could it possibly fail? It's in a prime location opposite House Of Fraser, with a whole load of footfall due to the fact that the Man On The Oss is around the corner.

Which is why it's puzzling that when myself and my dinner date arrived at 8pm on a Saturday, the place was all but deserted, with more serving staff than customers.

It may well be that we were in some kind of post-dinner, pre-chucking out time lull, or that word of mouth hasn't started working for Burger Priest yet. What this at least meant was that we got to take up one of the sofas in the funky interior – there are sofas, regular tables and high-stool diner-style

counters to choose from. As we entered, Rosanna by Toto was playing on the music system which I took as a good sign. Largely, I was proved correct.

It's a fascinating proposition, is Burger Priest, with a menu full of the weird and the eccentric and the occasionally downright loopy. If you wanted, for example, you could feast on something called the Surf'n'Turf Burger, six ounces of meat patties on a bun, with lobster tail meat and seafood sauce.

**Trimmings**

Another option might be the Mac and Cheese Dog, which as the name suggests is a Frankfurter sausage on a bun, topped with crispy bacon and macaroni and cheese. I think it's fair to say that one has enough stodge for anyone.

My comrade and I decided to play it safe and go for the Altar Burger, one each, which is simply a double-patty burger with bacon, smoked Applewood cheese and all the salad trimmings. You have the option of piling on some extras at no extra cost if you feel the need, which I obviously did, and

so I decided to throw in a layer of sautéed mushrooms too – sautéed onions, bell peppers and beef tomato are among some of the other choices.

Now, initially I had intended to just get a burger and fries, but at the last minute I had a rush of blood to the head and decided that my side should be salted beef poutine, consisting of French fries in meat gravy with cheese curd.

Well it seems like Burger Priest subscribe to the American model of meat patty – basically, shape a big lump of beef until it is roughly round and then slap it on the grill with the minimum of frills and let it go. The smoked cheese is, I would argue, the perfect cheese to accompany a burger, and the bacon was thick and rustic.

Burger Priest definitely isn't for everyone – it's loud, it's funky, it's a bit brash and you have to be prepared to literally get your hands dirty. My suggestion to them would be to provide the customers with multiple wet wipes and then they'd be nudging true greatness. Even so, they claim to treat their meaty products with a touch of the divine, and in me, they have a new convert.



CHOICE



Peter Capaldi

**Doctor Who (BBC1, 5.45pm)**  
It's been a bleak year for Whovians. Instead of having a full series to enjoy, there's been nothing apart from spin-off series Class. It's been delightful, but it's just not the same as having some Tardis action to get your teeth into. But, as they say, absence makes the heart grow fonder, and as Steven Moffat (who bows out as the showrunner next year) has had an extra 12 months to work on this single episode, we're expecting big things. Not that the BBC is letting fans know too much about it – as with previous episodes, it's only giving away the barest essentials. So we'll see Peter Capaldi's Time Lord travel to New York, where he comes face to face with a mysterious superhero called The Ghost.

BBC1

**6.00 Breakfast. 9.00 CBeebies** The Nutcracker. **9.45 Legend of the Boneknapper Dragon.** (R) **10.00 Christmas Day Service** – Live from Bristol Cathedral. **11.00 Songs of Praise:** Christmas Big Sing. **11.40 BBC News.** Weather. **11.50 Film:** The Groods. (2013) **1.20 Shaun the Sheep:** The Farmer's Llamas. (R) **1.50 Top of the Pops Christmas. 2.50 BBC News:** Weather. **3.00 The Queen's Christmas Broadcast.** **3.10 Film:** Frozen. (2013) **4.45 The Great Christmas Bake Off. 5.45 Doctor Who.** **6.45 Strictly Come Dancing Christmas Special.** Tess Daly and Claudia Winkleman host the festive special, with previous contestants Denise Lewis, Frankie Bridge, Pamela Stephenson, Ainsley Harriott, Gethin Jones and Melvin Odoom. **8.00 Call the Midwife.** Christmas special, in which the nurses of Nonnatus House travel to South Africa to help the struggling staff of a mission clinic faced with closure. Sinead Cusack guest stars. **9.30 EastEnders.** Any hopes of a merry Christmas seem slim with Phil's health deteriorating rapidly. Lee struggling with the burden of his secrets and the return of none other than Max Branning. **10.30 Mrs Brown's Boys Christmas Special.** Grandad's health causes concern. Mrs Brown steps in when a fire at the salon leaves Rory and Dino with nowhere to work, while Dermot faces stiff competition to win a contract. **11.00 The Best of Tracey Ullman's Show.** Highlights from the comedy sketch show, as well as some brand new material, including a look at what would happen if Clare Balding was left in charge of BBC's Christmas schedules. **11.30 BBC News:** Weather. **11.45 On Christmas Night.** Don Warrington reads the bible story of the shepherds' visit to the Christ Child. **11.50 Would I Lie to You? At Christmas.** With Richard Osman, Tom Courtenay, Sara Pascoe and Chris Kamara. (R) **12.20 Have I Got a Bit More** 2016 News for You. **1.05 Citizen Khan.** (R) **1.35 Film:** While You Were Sleeping. (1995) **3.10** Weather for the Week Ahead. **3.15 BBC News.**

BBC2

**6.40 Countryfile.** (R) **7.35 Film:** The Cat in the Hat. (2003) **8.50 Film:** Tom Thumb. (1958) **10.20 Film:** Bee Movie. (2007) **11.40 Carols from King's.** (R) **12.55 Wild Tales** from the Village. (R) **1.55 The Good Life.** (R) **2.25 Film:** The Artist. (2011) Oscar-winning silent drama, starring Jean Dujardin. **4.00 Dancing the Nutcracker** – Inside the Royal Ballet. **5.30 Sign Zone:** The Queen's Christmas Broadcast. (R) **5.40 The Morcambe and Wise Christmas Show** – 1976. (R) **6.45 Christmas University Challenge.** Alumni of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and St Hilda's, Oxford compete in the penultimate first-round match of the special run of Christmas episodes. Jeremy Paxman hosts. **7.15 Blackadder's Christmas Carol.** Kindly Victorian pushover Ebenezer Blackadder is visited by the Spirit of Christmas and gains an insight into the dastardly deeds of his ancestors. Starring Rowan Atkinson. (R) **8.00 Dad's Army.** Pompous Captain Mainwaring proves he is a softie at heart by organising a Christmas treat for the struggling senior citizens of Walmington-on-Sea. (R) **8.30 Gospel Christmas.** Gregory Porter and Beverley Knight host a concert from St John at Hackney, London, featuring the London Community Gospel Choir, the House Gospel Choir performing in front of a live audience, with guest vocalists including Katy B, Shaun Escoffery and vocal quintet Vadé. **9.30 Victorian Bakers at Christmas.** The bakers prepare Victorian Christmas recipes, including twelfth cakes, bread-based punch, roasts to feed entire communities, and mince pies made with either beef or tripe. **10.30 QI XL.** Sandi Toksvig and Alan Davies are joined by Josh Widdicombe, Susan Calman and Matt Lucas for an extended festive special, with a series of tough questions on the subject of Noel. **11.15 Film: Great Expectations.** (2012) An orphan is given the chance to rise through high society with the assistance of a mysterious benefactor. Period drama, with Jeremy Irvine and Helena Bonham Carter. **1.15 Film:** A Hard Day's Night. (1964) **2.40 This Is BBC Two.**

ITV

**6.00 CITV:** Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. **6.10 Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids.** (R) **6.20 Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures.** (R) **6.35 Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures.** (R) **6.50 Super 4.** (R) **6.55 Sooty.** (R) **7.10 Oddbods.** (R) **7.15 Oddbods.** (R) **7.20 Almost Naked Animals.** (R) **7.30 Almost Naked Animals.** (R) **7.45 Horrid Henry.** (R) **8.00 Horrid Henry.** (R) **8.15 Horrid Henry.** (R) **8.25 Weekend at Christmas.** **9.25 Countrywise:** Guide to Britain. (R) **9.55 Film:** Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. (2002) **3.00 The Queen.** **3.10 Film:** The Lion King. (1994) Disney animated musical, with the voice of Matthew Broderick. **4.55 ITV News:** Weather. **5.15 You've Been Framed!** Harry's Naughty List. **5.45 Emmerdale.** **6.45 Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs at Christmas.** The comedian visits Battersea Dogs & Cats Home at Christmas, and tries to get a snuggle-toothed sheltie the royal seal of approval when the Duchess of Cornwall drops by to open a new building. Paul also arranges an ultrasound for a heavily pregnant pug cross and nurses a dog with painfully bowed legs. **7.45 ITV News:** Weather. **8.00 Coronation Street.** Leanne is thrilled when Toyah returns to the cobbles, while Peter and Nick wind up brawling in the street, and Bethany collapses in the ginnel from an overdose. **9.00 Maigret's Dead Man.** Rowan Atkinson stars as the Parisian detective in the second in a run of adaptations of Georges Simenon's books. Maigret is distracted from a string of attacks on three wealthy farms by a series of anonymous phone calls from a man who claims a gang is trying to kill him. He and his trusty associates LaPointe and Janvier go in search of the caller, which leads them to the discovery of a body that has been dumped out of a car. Maigret is convinced the corpse is the man who phoned him – but his face has been mutilated, making it impossible to confirm his identity. **11.00 Film: Love Actually.** (2003) Interlinked tales of several people in search of love. Richard Curtis's romantic comedy, with Hugh Grant, Martine McCutcheon, Emma Thompson and Colin Firth. **1.30 Film:** King Kong. (2005) **4.25 ITV** Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

**6.20 Prep & Landing:** Naughty v Nice. (R) **6.40 The Bear.** (R) **7.10 Painting the Bear Hunt.** **7.15 Film:** Animals United. (2010) **8.55 The Simpsons.** (R) **9.20 The Simpsons.** (R) **9.50 The Simpsons.** (R) **10.20 The Simpsons.** (R) **10.50 Ice Age: A Mammoth Christmas.** (R) **11.15 Painting the Bear Hunt.** **11.20 Father Christmas.** (R) **11.50 The Snowman.** (R) **12.20 Film:** The Wizard of Oz. (1939) Disney animated adventure, with the voice of Rickie Sorenson. **2.05 The Alternative Christmas Message.** **2.15 Channel 4 News.** **2.20 Film:** It's a Wonderful Life. (1946) Fantasy drama, starring James Stewart. **4.55 The Snowman and the Snowdog.** (R) **5.25 We're Going on a Bear Hunt.** (R) **6.00 Film: Home Alone.** (1990) A boy has to fend for himself when he is accidentally left behind after his family jets off to Paris for Christmas. The youngster initially enjoys his freedom, but is soon forced to resort to ingenious booby traps to defend the family home from two dim-witted burglars. Comedy, starring Macaulay Culkin, Joe Pesci, Daniel Stern, John Heard, Catherine O'Hara and John Candy. **8.00 Travel Man: 48 Hours in Florence.** Rebel Wilson joins Richard Ayode on a rapid-fire tour of the Italian city, taking in as much as they can in just two days. They race past iconic works of art including Botticelli's Venus and Michelangelo's David, take in some street art, go on a rafting trip down the River Arno, climb to the top of the city's cathedral and dine on a traditional tripe sandwich. **9.00 Gogglebox 2016.** A look back at some of the highlights of this year's series, featuring regular armchair presenters Leon and June, Christopher and Stephen, and the Michaels family offering their thoughts on popular and topical TV shows. **10.30 Alan Carr's Christmas Chatty Man.** The host is joined for this Christmas special by guests including Tom Daley, Gary Barlow, Danni Minogue and Martin Kemp, with music from Emeli Sandé and Robbie Williams. **12.35 Film:** Four Christmases. (2008) **2.05 Rude Tube Christmas Cracker.** **2.16 (R) 3.05 Very British Problems** at Christmas. (R) **4.00 Location, Location, Location.** (R) **5.00 Supershoppers.** (R) **5.25 The Restoration Man.** (R)

CHANNEL 5

**6.10 Milkshake!** Milkshake! Festive Fun. **6.15 Shimmer and Shine.** **6.40 Paw Patrol.** (R) **7.00 Angelina Ballerina.** (R) **7.20 Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom.** (R) **7.35 Film:** An American in Paris. (1951) Romantic musical, starring Gene Kelly and Leslie Caron. **9.50 Film:** On the Town. (1949) Musical, starring Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Jules Munshin. **11.50 Film:** Scrooge. (1970) Musical fantasy, starring Albert Finney. **2.10 Film:** The Wizard of Oz. (1939) Musical fantasy, starring Judy Garland. **4.10 Film:** Singin' in the Rain. (1952) Musical comedy, starring Gene Kelly. **6.15 Britain's Favourite Xmas Songs.** A countdown of popular songs that are guaranteed to make any Christmas party go with a swing. Highlights include the Jackson 5's Santa Claus Is Coming to Town, Greg Lake's I Believe in Father Christmas, the Waitresses Christmas Wrapping and the Pogues and Kirsty MacColl's Fairytale of New York. Is Mud's Lonely This Christmas past its sell-by date? Will Jona Lewie ever Stop the Cavalry? And where would any Christmas party be without Slade and their classic anthem Merry Xmas Everybody? But which one will top the nation's festive chart? Featuring contributions by artists, producers, video directors, composers and journalists, who shed light on the creation of the songs and their accompanying videos. (R) **8.30 When Celebrities Go Pop.** A countdown of the 40 most memorable musical efforts by celebrities who have decided to diversify into music. The programme features performances by Mr T, Katie Price, Vinnie Jones, Sam Fox, Eddie "The Eagle" Edwards, David Hasselhoff, an assortment of soap stars and Christopher Lee, who embarked on a second career as a heavy-metal singer in his 80s. **10.30 Film: Dallas Buyers Club.** (2013) Premiere. A man diagnosed with HIV sets up an organisation to smuggle drugs for treating the condition into the US. Fact-based drama, starring Matthew McConaughey and Jared Leto. **12.45 Greatest Ever Christmas Songs.** (R) **1.10 SuperCasino.** Live interactive gaming. **3.10 Chris Tarrant:** On the Xmas Express. (R) **4.00 Now That's Funny!** (R) **4.50 House Doctor.** (R) **5.40 Angels of Jarm.** (R) **5.50 Roary the Racing Car.** (R)

DIGITAL

**BBC Four**  
**7.00 King Lear** **10.10 The Good Old Days:** Christmas 1976 **11.00 Top of the Pops Christmas Hits** **12.00 Old Grey Whistle Test:** 70's Gold **1.30 All Aboard!** The Sleigh Ride **3.30 Close**  
**ITV2**  
**11.00 You've Been Framed!** With Bells On **11.35 Emmerdale** **12.00 Coronation Street** **1.05 Film:** The Polar Express (2004) **3.10 You've Been Framed!** **4.15 Catchphrase Christmas Special** **5.15 Minion Madness** **5.30 Film:** One Hundred and One Dalmatians (1961) **7.15 Film:** Mr Bean's Holiday (2007) **9.00 Film:** Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason (2004) **11.15 Family Guy** **1.10 American Dad!** **2.05 The Cleveland Show** **2.30 Film:** Not Another Teen Movie (2001) **4.10 The Almost Impossible Gameshow** **5.00 Planet's Funniest Animals** **5.45 ITV2** Nightscreen  
**ITV3**  
**11.30 Film:** Carry On Cleo (1964) **1.25 Film:** Carry On Girls (1973) **3.15 Film:** Carry On Camping (1969) **5.05 Film:** Carry On Up the Jungle (1970) **7.00 Film:** Carry On Cowboy (1966) **9.00 Film:** Stepoe and Son Ride Again (1973) **11.00 Film:** The Sting (1973) **1.10 Film:** The Four Musketeers (1974) **3.35 Wycliffe** **5.00 Doctor at Large** **5.25 Movies** **Now 5.35** ITV3 Nightscreen  
**ITV4**  
**11.30 Film:** The Green Berets (1968) **2.20 Film:** Dunkirk (1958) **5.05 Film:** Where Eagles Dare (1968) **7.10 Film:** Jaws: The Revenge (1987) **10.00 Film:** Body of Lies (2008) **12.35 Film:** The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (2011) **3.30 Hell on Wheels** **4.15 The Wine Show** **5.10** Goodwood Classic Cars  
**E4**  
**11.25 Rude (ish) Tube Shorts** **11.30 Baby Daddy** **12.30 How I Met Your Mother** **2.30 The Goldbergs** **3.00 The Big Bang Theory:** Festive Games **6.00 Frozen** at Christmas **7.00 The Snowman** **7.35 The Snowman and the Snowdog** **8.00 The Big Bang Theory** **9.00 Film:** The Inbetweeners 2 (2014) **11.00 The Inbetweeners** **1.20 Tattoo Fixers** at Christmas **2.25 Virtually Famous** Christmas Special **3.10 The Inbetweeners** **3.35 Hollyoaks**  
**Film4**  
**11.00 Rio** (2011) **12.50 Ice Age:** Dawn of the Dinosaurs (2009) **2.35 Cheaper By the Dozen** (2003) **4.25 The Princess Diaries** (2001) **6.35 The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel** (2011) **9.00 Thor** (2011) **11.15 Your Highness** (2011) **1.20 Vertigo** (1958) **4.00 Close**

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FILM CHOICES

**BOXING DAY**  
**Captain Phillips, ITV, 9pm**  
An American cargo ship sets a dangerous course around the coast of Somalia, while inland, four men are pressed into service as pirates by the local warlords. The captain is taken hostage when the raiding party hijacks the vessel, resulting in a tense five-day crisis. Fact-based thriller, starring Tom Hanks and Barkhad Abdi. (2013)

**TUESDAY**  
**Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, ITV, 7.30pm**  
The teenage wizard is chosen to represent Hogwarts School in a dangerous magical tournament. Fourth instalment of the fantasy saga, starring Daniel Radcliffe and Robert Pattinson. (2005)



Captain Phillips, Boxing Day, ITV, 9pm

**WEDNESDAY**  
**Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, ITV, 7.30pm**  
The young wizard struggles to convince his fellow sorcerers that the evil Lord Voldemort has returned to life. When Hogwarts headmaster Dumbledore is ousted in favour of a sadistic replacement, Harry realises he must take matters into his own hands, uniting his fellow pupils to form a secret army and training them for the inevitable confrontation to come. Adventure sequel, starring Daniel Radcliffe. (2007)

**THURSDAY**  
**Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull, BBC1, 11.20pm**  
The globe-trotting archaeologist races against Soviet agents to find a mysterious artefact of untold power. Action adventure sequel, starring Harrison Ford and Cate Blanchett. (2008)

**FRIDAY**  
**Captain America: The Winter Soldier, BBC1, 8.30pm**  
The superhuman soldier becomes an operative for secret intelligence agency SHIELD, but grows suspicious of their motives. Following a battle with a mysterious cyborg assassin, he and fellow Avenger Black Widow become fugitives, and try to bring down a sinister conspiracy. Comic-book thriller sequel, starring Chris Evans. (2014)

Money matters in this mystery tale of murder

TV may have brought us the definitive version of Hercule Poirot, but the BBC feels like the small screen home of Agatha Christie.

It has adapted the Miss Marple cases, and broadcast adventures based on the Tommy and Tuppence characters last year, as well as a blockbusting version of And Then There Were None.

The latter was shown during the festive season, and this year, there's another all-star Christie feast for fans – this take of her classic short story, The Witness for the Prosecution.

"And Then There Were None made a huge impact last year, garnering great reviews and audiences of over eight million," remarks executive producer Karen Thrusell. "We're thrilled to be reunited with Sarah Phelps as she takes on another iconic title, an incendiary courtroom drama that will keep you guessing right to the very end. The source material is so strong, and we hope the end result will be every bit as striking as And Then There Were None."

The Witness for the Prosecution is

no stranger to screen treatment, of course. The BBC made the first version way back in 1949; a US version made it to TV in 1953, the same year it was first produced as a stage play.

Perhaps the most famous adaptation came in 1957 when it was turned into a movie by none other than the legendary Billy Wilder, who cast Charles Laughton, Marlene Dietrich and Tyrone Power (in his final completed part) in the lead roles.

Then, in 1982, another TV drama followed, this time featuring an all-star cast that included Ralph Richardson, Deborah Kerr, Donald Pleasence and Wendy Hiller. It was recently announced that Ben Affleck will direct and star in a future take on the tale.

Filming for the latest production based on the story took place in Liverpool this summer and sees Toby Jones, Andrea Riseborough, Kim Cattrall and David Haig taking lead roles.

"With the long terrible shadow of the Great War falling across the rackety, feral 1920s, The Witness For The Prosecution is a compelling story of

deceit, desire, murder, money and morality, innocence and guilt, heartbreak and – most painful and dangerous of all – love," says Phelps. "At the centre of this dark and tangled net is the astonishing character of Romaine, a noir heroine for all our times."

Romaine is an enigmatic chorus girl and the partner of Leonard Vole, a young chancer who has been accused of the brutal murder of the enormously wealthy Emily French. She's been found in her handsome 1920s London residence and, having left her fortune to Vole, he certainly had a motive to kill her.

Vole is convinced that Romaine can prove his innocence, but he is in for a terrible surprise...

"Combining Sarah's brilliance with the excellent and skilful eye of our director, Julian Jarrold, we expect to deliver a show that will thrill both audiences who have enjoyed Christie's work before and those who are coming to it for the first time," claims Hilary Strong, CEO of Agatha Christie Ltd.

Let's hope her verdict is the right one!



The Witness for the Prosecution, Boxing Day, BBC1, 9pm

BEST OF THE REST

**BOXING DAY**  
**Still Open All Hours**  
**BBC1, 8.30pm**  
Granville and Gastric find themselves playing marriage counsellors, while Leroy adopts a festive disguise to avoid relationship trouble of a different kind. Meanwhile, Mrs Featherstone struggles to get into the Christmas spirit and Kath attempts to bring the street together as one harmonious choir of carollers to beat Finkle Street once and for all - but does Granville have a trick up his sleeve to help them out? David Jason, Tim Healy, James Baxter and Stephanie Cole star.

**TUESDAY**  
**There's a Croc in My Kitchen**  
**Channel 5, 8pm**  
Documentary following people around Britain who keep predatory wild animals as unusual pets. Chris Weller from Kent owns a crocodile, and spent £20,000 converting his house to accommodate the dangerous reptile, while in Gloucester, Patricia and her sons live with a serval, a big cat that is one of Africa's deadliest hunters. Jim and Chris own a 20-stone Komodo dragon, while Terry fears his pet lynx Pudding may have been poisoned. Devon resident Andre owns a wolf hybrid that shares her bed – but fears he may be on his last legs.

**WEDNESDAY**  
**Jonathan Creek**  
**BBC1, 9pm**  
It's not quite a Christmas ghost story, but there's definitely a spooky element to Jonathan's latest case, which centers on Daemons' Roost, the home of a 19th-century sorcerer who claimed to be able to summon the powers of Hell. The property now belongs to horror film director Nathan Clore (played by Ken Bones, which is arguably an even better name for a gore maestro) who summons his stepdaughter Alison (Georgie Lord) home so he can explain exactly what happened to her family there when she was a child. Unfortunately, Clore suffers a debilitating stroke before he can come clean, leaving Alison to try to piece together the mystery together herself. Jonathan may be just the man to help her, but his wife Polly (Sarah Alexander) believes he's already got enough on his plate. Meanwhile, the Reverend Wendell Wilkie (Warwick Davis) also finds himself drawn into the mystery.

**THURSDAY**  
**Life in the Snow**  
**BBC1, 8pm**  
Gordon Buchanan goes in search of

animals that live in snowy conditions and have adapted to survive in cold weather. The programme features polar bears raising their cubs, owls keeping their supplies of food hidden under a layer of snow, penguins that huddle together for warmth, and wolverines and ravens working alongside each other to find food. He also takes a look at the lives of animals associated with Christmas, including robins and reindeer, revealing the truth behind the story of Rudolph's red nose.



Jonathan Creek, Wednesday, BBC1, 9pm

**FRIDAY**  
**Noel's Sell or Swap Live**  
**Channel 4, 7pm**  
Children of the 1970s and 1980s might remember Noel Edmonds' Saturday morning TV show Multi Coloured Swap Shop which, in the days before the internet, gave kids a

chance to offload their junk by exchanging it for someone else's. So, prepare to feel nostalgic as Noel hosts this familiar-sounding programme, in which guests get a chance to bid on an eclectic mix of items. The owners will also be there to explain why they are getting rid of their stuff – it might be an unwanted present, something bought in haste, or the cause of a series of family rows. Or perhaps they just thought it would be more fun to be on the TV than to sell it online. Either way, Noel and his SoS team are here to help.

**Judi Dench: All the World's Her Stage**  
**BBC2, 8pm**  
She's one of Britain's greatest actors and has also been dubbed 'the second most popular woman in Britain' (presumably the Queen pipped her to the top spot). Now this documentary, narrated by Colin Salmon, looks back over her remarkable 60-year career, and finds out just why she has become such an institution. The actors sharing their memories of working with her include Daniel Craig, Sir Ian McKellen and Billy Connolly, who reminisces about the time he thought Judi was falling for him on the set of Mrs Brown. Former Miss Money Penny Samantha Bond reveals that she had to calm Pierce Brosnan's nerves before his first scene with the legendary actress.

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# HOROSCOPES 2017



## Aries

(March 21 to April 20)

Never backward in coming forward, this year gives you the ideal opportunity to display your talents and charm. Consider it a showreel for your life as you want it to be. Those dreams of success? Clearly you are determined to see them become reality! January brings freedom and the urge to kick out and experience life.

Watch those spending sprees though, as the 'feel-good factor' could see you splashing the cash. Passionate temptations are all around and serious self-control will be called for.

Trying not to fall in love with love will be hard, especially through summer and autumn.

If you seek someone who is adventurous and spontaneous, then make a beeline for a Sagittarius or Leo.

Looking for someone to complement your softer side? Someone who will fan your fire? Then Libra and Gemini are for you.

This could be the time that you start a business or develop your current career.

Partner yourself with someone who will sort out the day-to-day nitty-gritty while you keep sales soaring.

**OVERALL:** A year in which you decide to be yourself and a great deal less flexible. You also decide to aim high in anything you do. Shooting for the stars? Why not!



## Taurus

(April 21 to May 21)

Making the most of opportunities at work, growing a business or developing your career? In this new year, these run a close second to that wonderfully sensuous love life of yours!

Determination is your middle name and you attract love and money like a magnet. So, what is not to like?

One word of caution. Health. Burning the candle at both ends could see you singed.

Make the most of that all-important time to rest and recharge your batteries.

Pace yourself.

You will always find time, of course, to enjoy the finer things in life: music, art and any sensual pleasures that take your imaginative fancy. That you have to work hard for these does not phase you.

Summer is a pleasurable time and bonds with new people, lovers and family abound.

It is now that you fully appreciate how important family and friends are to you.

You are a desirable companion and lover!

You will find fun with Virgo and Scorpio and fan the flames of passion with Libra and Gemini.

Enjoy.

**OVERALL:** A year in which you manage to fruitfully combine work with pleasure, being both responsible and rather exciting at the same time. How many signs can lay claim to that?



## Gemini

(May 22 to June 21)

An exciting mind and an excitable body make you one of the most lovable signs. Who would not want to be in your social circle?

Always in demand, now you could be spoilt for choice. This also applies to your working life, where chances to shine start early. Showcasing yourself in the arts or travel will light up your buttons!

A year when you feel at home and in your element.

For some, a hobby can give this outlet, but for others it can become an obsession. Find your best mate in either Libra or Sagittarius, but don't let anyone keep you earth-bound!

You can hear the buzz from an open mind miles away and will be attracted. Make the most of these fleeting but important opportunities to find someone special.

Those who already have a partner will want to be more adventurous. Gathering information sounds boring, which you find intolerable.

However, with your special way of making words come alive and pictures shine out, you find a special niche.

Spring and autumn alike find you seeking out unusual and thrilling new friends.

Circulate!

**OVERALL:** Remember that the more social effort you make, the greater will be your success. The chance to build on all of your relationships brings a winter of great satisfaction and deepest pleasure.



## Cancer

(June 22-July 23)

Known for valuing your home and privacy, this year will be no exception. Protection is your game and that applies to others as well as yourself.

A surge of love and companionship through the spring encourages you to come out of your shell. It is a time to reach out to form partnerships, be they professional or personal.

Sometimes the two meet and, as the year progresses, so does your attraction for someone special and perhaps older.

Late spring and summer is a good time to seal deals and move home or career. This is where your instinct and intuition kicks in.

The chance of a deeper love and understanding comes partly because of efforts that were made in the past. However, when it comes to matters of the heart, there is a need to be more open and accepting.

It can be hard to let someone into your life if you fear being hurt.

Please don't let that stop you from having the kind of love you have always desired.

Passion with Pisces or Leo can be fun and challenging, but look for the Libran influence for truer understanding.

**OVERALL:** A year when you are asked to accept what you do not fully understand in personal relationships. You think more deeply, love more deeply and go more with the ebb and flow of nature. Sound good? It is.



## Leo

(July 24 to August 23)

It may seem strange to start by concentrating on those around you, Leo.

This is, however, a year in which your greatest happiness and satisfaction will come from doing just that.

There is all the usual love and attention that you crave, but please pass some of it on. Much time is taken up with youngsters who show their willingness to learn.

Love is on your tail right through to the autumn and perhaps beyond. In a partnership already?

Then be ready to repel those boarders!

Early in the spring, a hiccup either at home or work could leave you puzzled and discontented.

Consider, rather than produce a knee-jerk reaction.

Cash cannot be king when you don't have enough of it.

At times you may feel like the poor relative, but you rise above this and maybe adjust your gift-giving or paying for too many rounds (one of your nicer traits!)

As the summer settles, helping and teaching others brings such satisfaction that a career or move in this direction is something to be considered.

**OVERALL:** A year that is a wee bit revolutionary by your own standards. Sometimes, though, this can lead us to fresher fields and new horizons. Your delight in children continues.



## Virgo

(August 24 to September 23)

The restlessness that typifies your sign is the strong point of movement. Constantly considering, plotting, changing and criticising those around you can appear negative. Not a bit of it!

With encouragement, you can work out any problem and solve any emotional issue. This year, challenges centre on love and wealth.

The possibility of a boost to the coffers is strong, maybe from a long distance or brought by someone so far unknown.

Any new love affairs could be fun, passionate, but short-lived. Libra and Scorpio figure heavily.

Don't go overboard and invest too much emotionally until you know someone is firmly in your mind and heart. Realise that all nature changes and your own thinking along with it.

Something that was important 10 years ago may now have passed into history.

There are possibilities for you grow through this year. Spoilt for choice? At times, yes.

Don't rush yourself and when you make a decision, make it wisely.

From a stable base, you are able to experiment and be flexible.

**OVERALL:** A year when you are happier with yourself than you are with others. That is a good sign for you, being good as you are at sorting priorities. There is no doubt of the direction both your work and love lives are going.



## Libra

(September 24 to October 23)

In a year of personal growth, the emphasis is on building on your strength and happiness.

Allow yourself to be indulged and edified, worshipped and adored. Everything in your life can be made fairer, more harmonious and beautiful.

It needs imagination rather than cash, which is just as well.

Ambitious signs such as Taurus and Capricorn attract because of their dynamic attitude.

As the year progresses, the emphasis becomes more on stabilising your position, be it in a partnership or on the financial side.

Tidy up any credit cards, loans or loose ends.

There may be cash in the coffers, but avoid spending it unless really necessary.

The word 'no', which is not often in your vocabulary, becomes uttered more as you decide not to accept second best.

Your nature means you will always help the weak, Libra.

However, you have decided that you will no longer allow yourself to be taken for granted.

**OVERALL:** It will be a year when flirting and loving see you very much in your element. You continue to make your home a sanctuary from that unbalanced outside world. Those who are looking for love will have fun searching and meet some fine folk.



## Scorpio

(October 24 to November 22)

Starting this year from a strong position, you see the future as a lump of clay waiting to be moulded. Others would spend months messing around and deciding what they want. You won't! How great it is to know your true path.

Affection is rife and mostly a two-way street. Some may flash by in their Lamborghini, others potter in their vintage delights. All, though, will be looking in your direction.

Build up your health and energy for a fast run from October.

If the cash is being splashed, try to make sure it isn't yours. Indulgence is your middle name and this is most likely to be shared by a Taurus or Pisces.

Passions are met and form an imaginative journey of sensuality. This is nature at its best, whether you find it in Paris, Birmingham or your garden!

The sights and sounds of the world inspire you so, be you a songwriter, poet or welder, you see creativity in everything.

Bonds are strengthened through play and travel.

**OVERALL:** A year that is creative and loving. Sharing your interests and those of a loved one brings knowledge and inspiration. Take the time to smell the roses, but ignore the thorns. Pamper your senses with colour and textures in the home.



## Sagittarius

(November 23 to December 21)

Moons around Jupiter showcase its beauty, and similarly your friends and family circle you in a web of love throughout this year. As you receive it, share the love around.

You like to have the best, the biggest and the most amazing. However, you also appreciate the rare and unique. New loves can be found, but your criteria are high.

Spellbinding Aquarius or loving Libra can moon over you all they like.

Look for friends where there is a good conversation to be had and where you can share in their humour and experiences.

As the autumn approaches there is a need for more exciting activities. Creativity goes hand in hand with travel and a possible link with working for a charity or raising funds through sport. Certainly you will need to burn off some of that high-octane energy! You work for yourself and your own goals, and if that benefits loved ones, what could be better? One thing you realise is you cannot help others unless you help your own needs first.

**OVERALL:** A year where excess can prevail, and not always to your advantage. Being practical is not the first thing on your mind when the adrenaline is running high. Even so, a bit of forward planning and care will avoid misfortunes.



## Capricorn

(December 22 to January 20)

Winning friends and influencing people? Nothing new there then! This year is a continuation of your previous success, but with a strong element of romance and even passion.

Will you be mixing business with pleasure? Probably not as you take your work seriously. However, that won't rule out the possibility of you working very closely with a loved one. Love is sometimes a puzzle to you. Can you be bothered to solve it? Could be worth your time...

Looking for a partner? Life rather than work?

The person with the right amount of sparkle and commitment could pop along at any time.

Be prepared to go to pastures new (maybe even abroad) and a delightful accent could charm your senses. Virgo and Sagittarius can set off a spark but will Leo make a match? A lovely face gets you interested, but can they cut it with the serious conversation?

Potential lovers should note that if they feed your mind, they will also fire your imagination.

**OVERALL:** A year when you take charge both at work and home. Great. One important point to be made though. You really must learn to relax more and let go of all those preconceived ideas. The only barrier to happiness comes from within.



## Aquarius

(January 21 to February 19)

Not immediately appearing to be a 'mover and shaker', it comes as a surprise to others when they see your direct and simple approach. This year you aim to stir up all sorts of preconceived ideas and attitudes.

Seek, in a partner, someone who will understand and be happy to listen to your theories of life, the universe and everything else besides.

A flighty number would soon get bored and fly the nest!

Work is something that can either easily bore you or totally take you over.

You prefer the latter at the moment. Passion at home is great, but you also need passion for a subject or plan. Quite clearly genius material, that's you!

Luck is on your side for most of this year, and especially in the autumn and winter.

Remember that, in politics, more than one opinion counts, as we are all aware.

Pushing yours too hard could see you on a sticky wicket or even getting the birdie!

**OVERALL:** A year when your passions show more than usual. Don't feel that you have any explaining to do. Sometimes you need to be single-minded. It's the only way to get progress and benefit others.



## Pisces

(February 20 to March 20)

Finding yourself and fulfilling your dreams is the mission for this new year.

Last year saw some emotional confusion.

You may still be looking for that elusive something or someone. No problem. So are many others and one of them may be looking for someone just like you!

Keep away from lethargy and fine-tune your curiosity.

Seek to know what, why and how about anything that catches your attention.

It is through this that your heart will begin to sing again.

Look hard, but not necessarily fast for someone who shares your hopes and attitudes. A negative friendship needs to be left behind.

No longer will you accept second best or being taken for granted. Being in a state of change is exciting.

Spend time with those who inspire and teach you how to get to where you want to be. This year you find companionship and maybe even love with sympathetic signs such as Libra or Cancer.

**OVERALL:** A year full of new possibilities. All you need is the confidence to pursue them. Easier said than done? Of course, but the rewards are high and the risk to your ego small indeed. Dreams need working toward.



# Most extreme school run for Kodiah

British parents spend almost nine weeks of their lives ferrying kids to and from the school gates, according to new research from Škoda. And for many – over a third (36 per cent) of UK mums and dads – the 'school run' is the most stressful parental duty that they undertake.

However, whilst traffic (64 per cent) is the most common obstacle facing people on their daily commute, spare a thought for those living in the most remote parts of the UK. According to Škoda's study, in the furthest flung places such as the Scottish Highlands and Welsh Valleys, delays to school runs caused by hazards such as flooding rise by as much as 18 per cent against the national average (56 per cent vs 38 per cent).

Livestock on the roads also causes issues. In the county of Sutherland in the far north of Scotland, and in the mid Wales county of Ceredigion, an average of one in ten parents regularly has to stop to bypass rogue sheep and cattle – almost twice as often as any other rural location.

On the back of these figures, Škoda sought out the country's 'most extreme school run' – a nationwide search for the family facing the toughest terrain and obstacles – to put its brand new large SUV, the Kodiah, through its paces in the UK for the first time.

Step forward the Joneses, a farming family based in Pontrhydfendigaid, Ceredigion, Wales.

Nestled amongst stunning picture-postcard scenery, the Jones' land even features its own waterfall. However, despite beautiful appearances, their location also offers up problematic driving obstacles than cause



The children really enjoyed travelling in the Kodiah



The off-road route features mud and water crossings



Part of the extreme run the Jones family has to make to get the children to school

the family delays of anywhere between ten minutes and two hours.

Dad William often has to use his chainsaw to help remove fallen trees, whilst ice and floods also present regular challenges – with a broken-down lorry blocking the road for two solid days last year. The Jones' cottage, Cwmroir, sits within its own micro-climate, meaning it can be snowing at home when it is raining at the children's school.

Mum Sarah Jones explained: "Every day

when we wake up we don't know what we're going to come up against on our school run, which is part of the fun of living up here really. We could take our horse Willow, but a 4x4 makes things so much easier."

Prior to its secretive arrival in Wales from the Czech Republic, the seven-seater Škoda Kodiah had completed over a million miles of testing in some of the most extreme climates around the world. In what was a typically wet and windy day in Pontrhydfendigaid,

that testing was the perfect preparation. The Joneses got to experience the Kodiah's outstanding 4x4 functionality, cutting across the valley via a slippery off-road route that features lots of mud and water crossings.

Sarah Jones concluded: "We were hugely impressed with the Kodiah and our journey to school was the smoothest we've ever experienced. It tackled flooded areas and hills with ease and we enjoyed the headroom and nice little extras such as the heated seats. The

seven seats would definitely come in handy for collecting our children's school mates and when they're not being used, we can pop our dogs in the back. The kids really want us to buy one now!"

Watch the Jones' extreme school run here: [skoda.uk/ExtremeSchoolRun](http://skoda.uk/ExtremeSchoolRun)

Škoda's first seven-seater SUV will start from just £21,495 and will be available in four trim levels with five engine options, two and four-wheel drive, and manual or DSG gearboxes.

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## specialists at your service

**aerials**

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**CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...**

I am very pleased with the response I get from my Classified Advertising Contract

Steve -

**AA Digital Aerials**

**FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL**  
**01902 319 191**

Brought to you by **Express & Star**

**AA DIGITAL AERIALS**  
AERIALS FITTED FROM £75  
WE'LL BEAT ANY QUOTE  
Work Guaranteed  
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**01384 429166**  
**01543 439095**  
**01922 716029**  
**07833 738857**

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**A SAME DAY REPAIR** - Cookers, Autos Fridges Vacs and Microwaves.  
Call 07900 578897 / 07801 746853.

**bathrooms**

**JRI Bathrooms & Wetrooms**  
Over 20 years experience in bathroom & kitchen installations.  
TILING/PLASTERING/FREE QUOTES  
**07392 379741 or 01543 529648**

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**P.FENLON BUILDERS** All aspects of building. Block paving, plastering, brickwork etc. 01902 445315 / 07790 286187.

**building supplies**

**RECLAIMED BRICKS**, Tiles, Slates, Oakbeams, Flooring, York Stone. Cawarden 01889 574066. sales@cawardenreclaim.co.uk

**carpentry & joinery**

**B & S JOINERY** Six internal pre-primed doors fully fitted from £250. 07958 552625.

**CARPENTRY AND JOINERY** Kitchens, fitted wardrobes, doors, flooring, staircases and refurb. 07903 234137 or 0121 4939733.

**carpet fitters**

**A CARPETS & VINYL** supplied or just fitted, quality samples brought to your home, no job too small, free quotes call Mark 01543 820598/07841 619694.

**carpet services**

**CARPETS AND VINYL** Fitted and supplied. 30 yrs exp. Free measuring/sample service 07376 195140.

**christmas trees/wreaths**

**christmastreesastapl.co.uk**  
Check above website or call 0121 505 3558 for quality real trees, blocked and netted.

**CHRISTMAS TREES**  
**Nordmann Fir from £20**



with **FREE mistletoe**  
**Holly Wreaths from £5.**  
**opp HOLLY BUSH GARDEN**  
**CENTRE EXIT, J11 M6.**  
**Open 7 days a week**

**cleaning**

**Sparkle Clean**  
Cleaning Services  
A standard of Excellence  
Office or Household cleaning  
Discounted rates for regular customers  
**FREE Enquiries & quotes call**  
**07818 238893** CRB checked

**electrical services**

**ALL ELECTRICAL** work from a switch to a rewire, insured, free quote 01902 575570 / 07358 627434.

**ALL HOME ELECTRICS** NAPIT registered. Fully insured. For a free quote call 07583 320318.

**MB ELECTRIC.CO.UK** Home wiring specialist, NICEIC. High quality local service. Free phone; 0800 211 8398 / 07939 503905

**fencing**

**PORTWAY FENCING**  
**SPECIAL OFFER**  
10 boys of quality fencing, concrete posts, gravel boards  
**HEAVY DUTY PANELS SUPPLIED AND FITTED**  
**0121 531 5250 / 07866 137 656**  
Mon - Fri 8am - 4.30pm  
Sat 8am - 12noon  
83 Portway Rd, W'bury  
**DELIVERY AVAILABLE**  
[www.portwayfencing.co.uk](http://www.portwayfencing.co.uk)

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**PROPERTY SOLUTIONS**  
A\*1 GUTTERING  
cleaned, repaired, replaced, facias/soffits, UPVC washdowns, all roofing/repainting work. Free quotes, 8am-8pm  
**01902 722447**

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**GAS SERVICES**  
• Boilers  
• Cookers  
• Fires  
• Gas Checks  
• Landlord Certificates  
• Gas Leaks Traced  
Fitted, Serviced and Repaired  
Same Day Service  
Free Quotes  
**DISCOUNTS FOR OAPs**  
**Call: 01902 366855/ 07761 973975**

**READERS ARE ADVISED**  
To check that anyone carrying out any Gas work is Gas Safe Registered.  
It is an offence under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 to carry out gas work in the UK without being on the Gas Safe Register.

**gates**

**ALL METAL GATES, RAILINGS**, etc. Free quotes, also repairs & fitting. 07903 500642 24 hours.

**DARLSTON FABS** 30 years exp in supplying/ fitting gates and railings. Free quotes: 07437 667752.

**gardening services**

**J&B Tree Care, Landscaping & Jetwashing Services**

- Trees, shrubs and hedges planted.
- Fencing supplied and erected
- Turf supplied and laid
- Stumps treated or removed
- Hedges and shrubs tidied
- All pesticide and fungicide work undertaken.
- Jetwashing of your driveways, walls and brickwork, paths and patios.

**FULLY INSURED and safety conscious!**  
**For a free fixed quote call:**

**01922 449268 or 07786 166856**

**Landywood Tree & Landscaping Services**

All garden work, tree felling/lopping, pruning, hedges trimmed, turf, patios, fencing, block-paving etc.

[www.landywoodlandscaping.co.uk](http://www.landywoodlandscaping.co.uk)

**01922 898 710 / 07973 177 976**

**handyman services**

**DAVIES INSTALLATIONS** Building work, plumbing, decking, supply & fit kitchens and bathrooms. Call: 07793 747829 / 01543 300444.

**house clearances**

**A1 HOUSE CLEARANCE**

Full, part and single rubbish removed.  
Garage and sheds cleared.  
Leather 3 piece suites and leather chesterfields wanted.

**01922 492007**

**ALL ROUND CLEARANCE**

Professional family run business  
House clearances full or part, also garages, sheds etc.  
Telephone Keiv  
**07794 912844**

**A ABSOLUTE BEST** cash price paid for house clearances and bereavements. Also removals undertaken.  
**07852 172641 / 07710 360327**

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Quick, discreet and professional.  
07939 421862 / 01902 410433

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**THE KITCHEN FITTER** Over 20 years experience. Call 07881 654757 or 01543 373233.

**painters & decorators**

**ADMI Decorating**, City and Guilds. No Job Too Small. OAP Discounts 07855 957935 - 01902 630028.

**C I PAINTING & DECORATING**  
Over 30 yrs experience. City & Guilds approved. Free Quotes. 07890 879 892 01902 650716.

**C&D DECORATING** City & Guilds / Wallpapering, Tiling and Flooring. Free quotes, call 07973 286288.

**plans prepared**

**ADAM DESIGN**, Building Plans. Drawn and submitted to council. Tel: 01902 620200 / 07841 654037. Email: adamdesign@sky.com

**BUILDING PLANS**, Prepared/Submitted. K J Bradley 01902 373248 07792 165767. www.plans4u.co.uk

**plastering**

**MINT PLASTERING**  
For the very best in plastering and rendering, full rooms inc materials from 110. Halls, stairs and landings from 200  
30 years experience.  
Free quotes. All work guaranteed  
**01922 606503 / 07519 694516**

**M & S PLASTERING & BUILDING SERVICES**, Home/Garden Improvements. Mark or Sara: 07741 770897

**plumbers**

**LAURIE KENNEDY** Domestic Plumbing Service, no job too small, fully insured, for an estimate please contact me on 07901345884



**plumbing & heating**

Premier Heating & Gas services

Installation, servicing and maintenance of all your domestic gas appliances

**07825 628288**  
info@premierheatingandgas.com

**A RELIABLE PLUMBER** No job too small. No call out fee. Call Lee: 07713 149278 / 01902 330351.

**A.A. HEATING & PLUMBING** All gas work. Install/Service/Repair. Kitchen/Bathrooms: 01922 660410

**PLUMBING WORK UNDERTAKEN** No job too small or large. Call Will for a free quote on: 07521 411108.

**removals**

**A & M CHEAP REMOVALS** Local Careful Firm Full or Part loads

**Call Don: 07749 941319**

**CALL DEAN NOW:** For all your Removal needs, 07429 452209/ 01902 830870 / 01384 940260.

**FURNITURE REMOVALS** We beat any quote, full or part loads, all areas. Call Keith on 07867 862227.

**KT HOUSE REMOVALS**

12 years experience. SINGLE ITEMS TO FULL LOADS. LOCAL OR DISTANCE. FULLY INSURED. Free Quotes - Call Ric on: **07771 727119**

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**CLIFF NICHOLLS** Roofing & Scaffolding Rubber Roofing

All Roofing and Scaffolding Work carried out.

35 years experience

**Freephone (0800) 220 - 729**

**MG ROOFING** Flat roofs, tiling, roof repairs, fascias and gutters. Call 01902 238989 / 07580 465449.

**skip hire**

**QUICKA SKIPS**

Mini, Midi, 6 Yard with doors and Builders. 7 days - Prompt Service

**01902 404800 / 07983 580884**  
www.quickaskips.co.uk

**A absolute affordable skip**

**RUSSELL SKIPS**

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**WOLVERHAMPTON SKIP HIRE**

MINI, MIDI & BUILDERS SKIPS WITH DOORS

Established 26 years

**Call: 01902 722876**

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**SB**

Recycling services

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**0121 558 2120**  
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Bring your own waste cheaper than skips. General, Green, Wood waste any size vehicle. Phone for prices: **0121 557 3346**

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BUY LOCAL, SELL LOCAL



**CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...**

"We are very happy with our Classified Contract within the Express & Star and the enquiries our adverts bring in."

**Pally - Quika Skips**

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL **01902 319 191**

Brought to you by **Express & Star**

**upholstery**

**MR B'S UPHOLSTERY**

RE-UPHOLSTERING OF SOFAS, DINING FURNITURE, CARAVANS, CAR RETRIMS AND MORE.

www.mrbupholstery.co.uk  
**01543 500677 / 07738 851601**

**ABANDON NOT!**

ESTABLISHED OVER 100 YEARS

**E. MARSH** Showroom, Elm House Pountney St, W. ton. WY2 4HX 01902 712484/424296

**4 Pets & Animals**

**equestrian corner**

ALL READERS are advised to check if Horses have the required Passport information.

**guns & dogs**

**NOTICE TO ADVERTISERS** Advertisers must ensure that they meet all necessary legal requirements for owning and using guns.

**pets corner**

**NOTICE TO READERS** Please be aware that when purchasing a puppy there are some simple guidelines you can follow to ensure that you are not purchasing from a Puppy Farmer:

1. Try to ensure you visit the puppy whilst it is still with its Mother.
2. Do not arrange to collect a puppy from any other location than that of the breeder.
3. Ensure that you are given any KC documentation, if pedigree. Whilst Midland & News Association publications take great care to avoid publication of advertisements from Puppy Farmers we cannot accept any liability should readers purchase from this kind of establishment.

**GREYHOUNDS MAKE WONDERFUL PETS**

All neutered, inoculated and microchipped.

Call 01922 412212 or www.rgtwolverhampton.co.uk

**RGT Wolverhampton @RGTWolves**

**JACK RUSSELL X Chihuahua** Puppies, girls only. £130. 07722 653466 after 4pm.

**MALINOIS BELGIAN** Shepherd pups two dogs, 12 weeks, chipped, vac's, wormed to date. Ideal Family pet. £350. 0794 9943933.

**C.A.A.R.'S ANIMAL SANCTUARY**

Registered Charity  
**PET RESCUE & BOARDING KENNELS**  
FOR DOGS AND CATS  
Open Mon to Sun  
Call 01922 476208  
Red Lane off Crab Lane  
Easington WV11 2DZ

**vets**

**Express & Star**

**THIS SPACE COULD BE PROMOTING YOUR BUSINESS**

Every day our customers get a great response from Classified Advertising.

So could you by calling our friendly experienced Sales Advisors on **01902 319191**.

**5 Business & Farming**

**business opportunities**

READERS are recommended to take appropriate professional advice before entering any obligations.

**business directory**

**commercial premises**

**STORAGE UNITS TO LET**

800sqft and 1600sqft. Burntwood area.  
**Ring Michael Bailey, 07538 867585.**

**6 Property**

**accommodation to let**

**J9 Accommodation**

**NO DEPOSIT**

**★MOVE IN TODAY★**

**Studios from £90pw\***  
**Rooms from £65pw\***

\*Includes All Bills

CHECK WEBSITE FOR LIST

**01902 213121**  
**J9accommodation.com**

**NOTICE TO READERS** It is an offence under the Accommodation Agencies Act 1953, for an Agency to charge a fee simply for the registration of your requirements and/or supplying particulars of premises to let.

**properties wanted**

**Need to sell your home fast?**

We can help you make a fresh start

With solutions to suit... you can clear your debts and make a fresh start

**Purchase Agreed Within 7 DAYS**

ALL CIRCUMSTANCES CONSIDERED  
COMPLETE ON DATE TO SUIT  
FREE VALUATION AND LEGALS  
FREE FRIENDLY ADVICE  
LOCAL COMPANY

**MARION PROPERTY SOLUTIONS**

**WHY NOT CALL US TODAY** for an informal, friendly and confidential chat?

**01922 311 030** OUR LINES ARE OPEN 24/7

\*Terms and Conditions apply

**Home Cash Buyer**

Sell today, sign today, complete when u wish

**£££ RENT BACK OPTIONS £££**

**Houses / Land Required**

Ring Paul 24/7 Local **07870 341 089**

Sandwell area: Call 0121 696 4154  
Walsall & Cannock area: Call 01922 432049  
Wolverhampton: Call 01902 489901  
www.homecashbuyer.co.uk

**Classified Ads** BUY LOCAL, SELL LOCAL

**CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...**

We have been advertising in the Express & Star and Chronicles for over 20 years and consider it a key part of our business with the regular flow of calls, which our advertising generates.

**Black Country Homes**

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL **01902 319 191**

Brought to you by **Express & Star**

**Classified Ads** BUY LOCAL, SELL LOCAL

**CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...**

"I am really pleased with the response I get from my Classified Advertising!"

**Paul Westwood - Home Cash Buyer**

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL **01902 319 191**

Brought to you by **Express & Star**

**overseas property**

**NOTICE TO READERS** Readers are advised to seek independent legal advice before entering into any financial commitments.

**7 Jobs**

**MANUFACTURING OPERATOR/SETTER** of Capstan and other factory machinery. Experience desirable, however training will be given. You must be hardworking, focused during monotonous, high volume operating and willing to work on any task. Temporary leading to permanent for right candidate. £8.50p/h. E-mail CV/letter richcook515@gmail.com No agencies

**full time - general**

Do you enjoy socialising and being in the company of others and helping them with day to day activities? Why not register on the PA Network and get paid for something that you enjoy and find rewarding.

Your role can vary from supporting with personal care, household jobs, shopping, paying bills, meeting friends, attending college, work or medical appointments."

**Personal Assistants**

are usually employed directly by the person requiring the support and some PAs can work for two or three clients during the course of a week. The person that you work for effectively becomes your employer.

This type of work will suit people who are interested in flexible working hours or who already work in the care sector, want part time hours or are looking for a second income.

Individuals who are interested in what the role can offer, but have no experience of working in a care type setting, can access training and support by engaging with Ideal for All.

For more information about the Walsall Personal Assistant Network visit [www.wclid.co.uk](http://www.wclid.co.uk) or call Viv Palmer, Ideal for All, on 0121 558 5555 or email [v.palmer@idealforall.co.uk](mailto:v.palmer@idealforall.co.uk).

**8 Motoring**

**cars over £1500**



**CHEVROLET SPARK PLUS**

62 reg, MoT August 2017, 5 door, fsh, light blue, 13,700 miles, still under warranty, lady owner, cheap tax, low insurance group.

£3,300 ono.

Telephone 07984 207513.



**KIA CARENS 2.0LGS**

09 reg, 71,000 miles, silver, 7 seater, electric windows, alarm, MoT June 2017, central locking, pas, alloys, stereo, CD. New tyres, fsh.

£1,950.

01922 418083.



**TOYOTA VERSO S**

2012, 14,878 miles, black, electric windows, air bag, air con, fsh, alarm, MoT, auto, central locking, pas, rear view camera. Bluetooth

£7,000 ono

07491 101100.

**cars under £1500**

**ADVERTISERS ARE REMINDED** that the Business Advertisements (Disclosure) Order of 1977 requires that advertisements must clearly differentiate between Private and Trade.

**BARGAIN**

**FORD FOCUS**

2003, 1.6, 5-dr hatch, petrol.

MoT June 2017,

**£350 ono.**

**01922 626560.**

**BARGAIN**

**PEUGEOT 206**

Silver, 1.4 petrol, V Reg., nine months MoT, 80,000 miles, alloy wheels, good, clean condition, many new parts.

**£375 o.n.o.**

**07502 027279.**

**driving tuition**

**Homer's**

**10 Hours £125! Four Hours £40!**

**2 Hours £20! All Areas Covered**

AD/PO REQUIRED. Gift vouchers available for £10

07432 458100 / 01562 870050

01384 234954 / 0121 5640090

01902 580055 [www.homersdrivingschool.co.uk](http://www.homersdrivingschool.co.uk)

**motorbikes**

**NFL MOTORCYCLE TRAINING** CBT to full licence. Call 8am - 9pm for deals 01902 494422.

**vehicles wanted**

**CROWN MOTORS** guarantee best price for your unwanted cars/vans. 07903 549849, buyer will call.

**vehicle hire**

**W.T.R. VAN HIRE** Connects, Transits, Lutons with Tail lifts, pick-ups Open seven days. 01902 457002 / 01384 79090.

**DALLAS**

Wide variety of vans:

- Small
- Large
- Lutons
- Tipper
- Flats
- Dropsides
- Crew
- Refrigerated
- Minibus

**Vans Starting from £35**

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[www.dallas-hire.co.uk](http://www.dallas-hire.co.uk) Tel: 0121 647 7112

**scrap vehicles**

**MCB**

**TOP PRICES PAID FOR ALL SCRAP CARS, VANS, BIKES, CLASSICS**

**Tel: 01902 408176**

**1000's of parts available at all times**

**MONMORE RD, WV1 2TZ**

OUR ADVERTISERS are reminded that it is an offence under the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 to buy scrap cars/metal for cash.

**THE JAP MAN** Top prices paid for cars, vans & 4x4s. All considered 01902 602090 / 07754 550862

**spares & accessories**

**mobile mechanics**

**MOBILE MECHANICS** Service & repairs. Headgasket, clutches and cambelts. 07747 648469.

**9 Local Information**

**public & legal notices**

**HAVE YOU CHECKED** your advertisement today? We would respectfully remind advertisers that it is their responsibility to inform the publishers of any mistakes or inaccuracies on the first day of publication.

**highways england**

**ROAD TRAFFIC REGULATION ACT 1984 - SECTION 14(1)(a) THE M6 MOTORWAY (JUNCTION 10, WALSALL) (TEMPORARY PROHIBITION OF TRAFFIC) ORDER 2016**

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that Highways England Company Limited (Company No. 9346363) intends to make an order on the M6 Motorway, in the Metropolitan Borough of Walsall, to allow ground investigation works to be carried out.

The effect of the Order will be to close, in phases, any slip road leading to or from the M6 at Junction 10.

The work is expected to start on 9 January 2016 and continue for 3 months. The Order will come into force on Monday 2 January 2017.

Vehicles being used by the emergency services, in connection with the works, by a traffic officer or for winter services purposes will be exempt from the closure.

Diversion routes via alternative junctions of the M6 will be signed.

For further information please contact David Reed on 0300 470 3321.

**Karen Eustace**, an officer in Highways England Company Limited.

Highways England Company Limited (Company No. 9346363)

registered office: Bridge House, Walnut Tree Close, Guildford, GU1 4LZ.

A company registered in England and Wales.

**WE NAILED IT!**

**Classified Advertising Works!**

To advertise your business call **01902 319 191**



# Local Specialists



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Chartered Accountants and Business Advisors

Specialising in self-employed, landlord, limited company and Construction Industry Scheme (CIS) clients. Professional, friendly and competitively priced accountancy and taxation services offered to suit your business needs:

- Self-Employed Accounts and Self-Assessment Tax Returns
- VAT Advice and Compliance
- Limited Company Financial Statements
- CIS Accounts, Monthly Returns and Self-Assessment Tax Returns
- Bookkeeping and Payroll
- Corporation Tax Advice and Compliance

Please call or e-mail to discuss your requirements and arrange a free consultation.



101 Mellish Road, Walsall, West Midlands, WS4 2DE

Telephone: 01922 613419

E-mail: [enquiries@gordon-and-co.com](mailto:enquiries@gordon-and-co.com)

Website: [www.gordon-and-co.com](http://www.gordon-and-co.com)

## Local Specialists



## Electricians

### MB electric

All domestic and commercial electrical works undertaken  
Home rewiring from £800

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01922 509984  
07939 503905  
[mbelectric.co.uk](http://mbelectric.co.uk)

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AS RECOMMENDED ON

thebestofwalsall

- Slate and Tile Repairs
- Flat Roofs, EPDM
- Rubber Roofing
- uPVC Soffits and Fascias
- Chimney Reducing
- Guttering Repairs
- All Pointing Work
- Insurance Work
- 20 Year Guarantee
- Dry Ridge Systems
- 25 Years Experience
- Re-Roofs
- All genuine quotes beaten
- Special rates for senior citizens

FREE ESTIMATES

CALL MARK:

01922 694548 / 07790 214856

[www.walsallroofingspecialists.co.uk](http://www.walsallroofingspecialists.co.uk)

### Brookes & Son ROOFING SERVICES

- ★ Discounts for OAP's
- ★ Insurance Work ★ Lead Work
- ★ Ridge Tiles Replaced
- ★ Flat Roofs ★ Pointing
- ★ Rubber Roofing (E.P.D.M.)
- ★ Chimney Repairs ★ Fascias & Gutters
- 25 years in the business

FAMILY RUN - FREE QUOTES

Call: 01922 711150  
07722 533247

ALL AREAS COVERED

## Local Specialists



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Self Assessment and all accountancy services for the self employed, rental incomes, partnerships and limited companies.

A prompt and reliable service at a sensible cost

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Robert Ollerenshaw on: Shenstone

01543 481329

Email: [ollerenshaws@btinternet.com](mailto:ollerenshaws@btinternet.com) [www.ollerenshaws.co.uk](http://www.ollerenshaws.co.uk)

Evening appointments not a problem

### R.G. Electrical Ltd

Est 1995

## ALDRIDGE

DOMESTIC - COMMERCIAL - INDUSTRIAL  
Homes - Shops - Offices

- Rewires and Upgrades • Emergency Breakdown
- PAT Testing • Central Heating Wiring • Storage Heaters
- Fire Alarms • Intruder Alarms • CCTV
- Building Society Surveys NICEIC Inspections



All areas covered 0800 298 2904

[robtelectrical@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:robtelectrical@blueyonder.co.uk)

37 Woodside Way, Walsall WS9 0HY



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### Digital Rapid Aerials

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- Cameras supplied & fitted
- Repairs - Tuning - Multirooms

OAP DISCOUNTS  
FREE QUOTATIONS

digital sky

A LOCAL BUSINESS YOU CAN TRUST

01922 693047  
07960 173589  
[www.digitalrapidaerials.co.uk](http://www.digitalrapidaerials.co.uk)

£10 off with this advert

freemove

## Double Glazing

### WINDOW DOCTOR

GLAZING REPAIRS & LOCKSMITHS.  
SERVICE & REPAIR FOR ALL DOORS & WINDOWS.

MISTY & BROKEN GLASS REPLACED.  
WE REPAIR HANDLES, HINGES, SEALS, PATIO'S, WINDOW & DOOR LOCKS.  
CONSERVATORY & GUTTERING LEAKS REPAIRED.

10 YR GUARANTEE

01543 504900 24 HRS Est 30  
07748 108035 years  
12 WELLINGTON DRIVE, CANNOCK WS11 1PU

## Driveways

### WESTCOT CONTRACTORS LTD

38 Years Experience  
TARMACADAM CONCRETE BLOCK PAVING  
LEADING DOMESTIC & COMMERCIAL CONTRACTORS COVERING  
LICHFIELD AND STAFFORDSHIRE

- Domestic Drives • Patios • Tennis Courts construction
- Commercial car parks and roads • Vehicle access crossing highway approved

Free quotations - All work guaranteed

Call for enquiries 07985 233112

Office 01543 251416

email: [westcot.contractors.ltd@gmail.com](mailto:westcot.contractors.ltd@gmail.com)

## Plumbing & Heating

### Pauls Home Services LTD

- Condensing Boilers
- Radiators • Upgrades
- Gas Work • Full Heating Breakdowns

Bathrooms • Cloakrooms  
• Kitchens • Plumbing  
• Tiling • Showers  
• Electrics • Plastering  
• Decorating • Lighting

FREE QUOTATIONS

ALL WORK GUARANTEED

07790 873567

01922 417062

NO CALL OUT CHARGE

## Loft Ladders

### LOFT SERVICES

UPVC or Wooden Drop Down  
Loft Hatch with Eastway  
Aluminium Ladder

£185 fitted

New or enlarged Loft access

• LOFT FLOORING

• LOFT INSULATION

Call Carl on

0121 556 1761

07502 103997

See our website

[www.westmidlandsloftservices.co.uk](http://www.westmidlandsloftservices.co.uk)

15 years' experience

## Plumbing & Heating

### R.S. Heating & Plumbing

Combi Boiler change from £950  
Specialists in Baxi / Baxi / Worcester Bosch / Vaillant Boilers plus many more

SPECIAL OFFERS ON FULL HEATING SYSTEMS

NATURAL & LPG GAS

Free Quotation

07961 140885

Fully Insured up to £2 million

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### A1 Little Job Man

(Part of the Imperial Residential Group)  
Over 35 years experience

- Fast Roof Repairs • Felt Work & Guttering
- New Roofs Chimneys & Valleys
- uPVC Fascias & Guttering FREE Quotes
- All Building Work Undertaken
- All Work Guaranteed • All Areas Covered

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Connor Newell, aged 14 from Willenhall, practises in the water



Young club member Jaden Davies, aged seven



Chloe Hall, aged 12, gets to work in the pool

# Swimming club hoping for new wave of interest

## SPORTING FEATURE

By Lewis Cox

**HEATH Town Swimming Club boast a long and illustrious history – and are now appealing for ‘fresh blood’ in a bid to keep the club afloat.**

The ASA-affiliated outfit have been a registered club for 83 years, and several of their volunteers and have been involved for around half of that time.

They have seen good and bad times, riding the wave of great highs and plunging to the depths of difficult lows.

One of those lows arrived when their home – Bushbury Swimming Baths in Wolverhampton – was forced to close in November 2006.

Numbers dwindled but, thanks to a few hardy souls that kept the club going at other baths, the Heath Town club lived on.

“I think we were down to just 16 swimmers at that time,” said Sheila Ratcliffe, aged 69, a former welfare officer and now assistant coach at the club.

### Important

“Keeping it running was so important because once a club folds then it’s very difficult to get it started back up again.”

It was the dedication of Ratcliffe and the committee that helped keep the club afloat.

They moved on to Wolverhampton Swimming and Fitness Centre shortly after and began building from the bottom again.

Ratcliffe, who has been helping out for 42 years, estimates there are around 200 members now connected with the club. But while that sounds impressive, she warns many of those are non-swimmers and some do not attend regularly.

They train on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings and use both the larger and smaller pool at the facility. “Numbers dwindle with kids in the sum-



Heath Town Swimming Club coach Rob Bonner at Wolverhampton Swimming & Fitness Centre

**“Keeping it running was so important because once a club folds then it’s very difficult to get it started back up again.”**

mer holidays but we expect that,” she said. “We need about 35 in the big pool and 20 in the little pool to pay the centre, it’s quite expensive.

“We cater for beginners and improvers and then they go into the big pool where we train with six lanes – our head coach Rob Bonner is a Level Two coach.”

Like Ratcliffe, Bonner’s association with the club began as merely ‘a parent’. Taking their children along to learn how to swim quickly turned into a hobby and a passion.

But Ratcliffe, originally from Wednesfield but who now lives in Willenhall, reflects the will to volunteer at a sports club is not what it once was. “We’ve adver-

tised for new volunteers or coaches – that we’d happily pay – to help keep our club going but people have too many other things to do these days,” she said.

“It’s not like it used to be. We also have Margaret Bennion, Alan Robinson and Joan Jarvis help out as volunteer coaches and they’ve been doing it nearly as long as me.

“The president, secretary and treasurer are all here but we’re all getting on and we need youngsters to step in, we need fresh blood.”

Club president is Ray Green, awarded the MBE four years ago for services to schools and swimming. His wife Sheila is secretary and Malcolm Foley – who used to swim with Ratcliffe’s daughter Wendy – is treasurer. “You can see how it is, we’ve all been here for a while and we love it and enjoy it but it is difficult,” Ratcliffe conceded.

“I never thought I’d be here all these decades later after bringing my children. If it wasn’t for my youngest grandson Connor coming to swim I might not have still been involved. But looking at it, it’s my passion and my hobby. We’ve been associated for so long, we just do it for the love.”



Swimming club members are now making a big splash



Sheila Ratcliffe with juniors Gracie Harrigan aged six, Zak Davis, seven, Jaden Davis and Lexie Davis, eight



Sheila Ratcliffe, president Ray Green MBE and coach Rob Bonner with club youngsters





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## Hamzah gets so close with finals effort

BOXING prospect Hamzah Ahmed had to settle for second place after a commendable effort in the National Association of Boys and Girls Clubs Championship finals.

It proved a double disappointment for Ahmed as he also lost out on a national title in the competition last year, writes Craig Birch. Ahmed stepped through the ropes as slight underdog against a highly-rated opponent at the Action Indoor Arena in Bristol.

It was finals day for Class A and B at the venue, as the culmination of the tournament made it crunch time for the finalists.

Walsall Wood's Ahmed had previously been thwarted in a Class A 57kg final and stepped up to Class B, for boxers born 2000, for this year at the same weight. It was looking good for Ahmed when he rocked rival Jamal Khan, from the Ring in London, towards the end of the first.

### Openings

A strong right uppercut set up a left hook which left Khan momentarily dazed and hanging on, the bell to end the first round coming to his aid.

They traded blows for most of the second, with Khan continuing to walk forward as Ahmed waited for openings.

Khan found his target with two right hands over the top in the third and last session, leaving a favourable impression on the judges.

Three out of five went him on a split.

## Hull strikes late to stretch Pics' lead at the top

RUSHALL Olympic were made to work hard for their 2-1 win at Skelmersdale United as a stoppage-time winner brought home all three points to stretch their lead at the top of the Evo-Stik League Premier Division to five points.

The breakthrough came on 34 minutes when Jazz Luckie fired home with the aid of a slight deflection.

It was Skelmersdale who started the second half on top as the mist started to roll in with Kenny Strickland seeing a dipping effort from distance land just over.

After Reid had a goal ruled out for offside, the Pics had to work hard to keep the home side at bay. The was a double blow for Rushall on 86 minutes when Henry Eze conceded a penalty and in doing so received his second yellow card. Chris Almond stepped up to make it 1-1 from the spot.

But more drama was to follow in stoppage time when Luke Bottomor's teasing cross wasn't properly cleared and as the initial strike was blocked, Joe Hull was on hand to turn the ball home and grab a hard-earned victory for the brave Pics.

## Brace apiece for Walker and Fitzgerald

Walsall 45 Yardleians 26

WINGER Ethan Walker and prop forward Pete Fitzgerald scored two tries apiece to help Walsall get a bonus point victory over their south Birmingham opponents.

It was a game that started at a furious pace with 38 points scored in the opening 22 minutes, with Fitzgerald the first on the sheet, converted by Mitch Carless.

The visitors levelled after 'stealing' a line-out and No8 Madeley crashed over with fly half Walker adding the extras.

A well-placed cross field kick by Matt Wood was scooped up by Ethan Walker, who finished off in

### Rugby

style. Three minutes later however, the visitors took the lead, winger Pearce getting the touchdown and Walker putting over a difficult conversion.

During the next five minutes Walsall scored, what would prove to be vital points as Mike Benson raced in for a try, followed by Walker, whose effort was converted by Carless. Yardleians hit back with prop Dunne going over.

Fitzgerald added to the Walsall score, Carless adding the conversion. Substitute Roger Weston

made an immediate impact, putting Wood over for a try, converted by Carless.

Both teams added to their tally in the last 10 minutes, fly half Walker went over for Yardleians but a Weston try, converted by Carless, completed the scoring.

Walsall United beat Aldridge 1sts at Delves Road 45-5, but the under-20s lost 45-20 to Tamworth counterparts.

Bloxwich RFC 80 Rugeley RFC 17

BLOXWICH RFC dispatched second in the league Rugeley, with a barnstorming 14-try demolition, after leading 39-0 at half-time.

## Management delighted by first double

Walsall Wood 2 Sporting Khalsa 1

THIS win for Wood gave the new management team their second win in four days, but more importantly gave them the first double of the season to move back into the top half of the table.

An entertaining opening few minutes saw the visitors just having the edge. On seven minutes Mensah Kinch got clear wide left, his cross hit first time wide by Degwon Ebanks.

Two minutes later Josh McKenzie crossed from the right to the near post, Marvin Nisbett saw his shot blocked, Ebanks fired the rebound goalwards but it deflected off Craig Deakin on the line and beyond the left hand post.

On 26 minutes Nisbett got clear wide left, his cross beyond the far post headed behind by Rikki Bains to deny Ebanks. The near post right wing corner saw Arnold fail to hold the ball under intense pressure, Mensah Kinch forcing the ball home from close range.

Wood put Khalsa under pressure at the start of the second half and after three minutes were back on terms. Butlin's strong run inside from wide right saw him go through three challenges before laying the ball back to Aiton. His goalbound effort was partially blocked by Turner, and Deakin pounced to force the loose ball home from close range.

Wood got the winner after 74 minutes when Aiton played a high ball forward wide left. Butlin, 10 yards beyond the last player, was judged to be not interfering with play until a defender went up for the ball, it skimmed off the top of his head, through to Butlin on the left edge of the box to run on and calmly curl the ball past the stranded Turner and into the far corner of the net.

Leicester-based newcomers St Andrews are visitors to the ML Safety Stadium on Boxing Day (12.30pm).

## Lockmen suffer as Casuals run riot

WILLENHALL Town suffered their own Nightmare Before Christmas as they gift wrapped nearly every goal to Wolverhampton Casuals in a 9-2 drubbing in the West Midlands League Premier Division.

Kevin Nickle was outstanding, finding the net seven times.

With the half-time score 5-1, The Lockmen started the second half more threatening but Nickle netted the sixth on 59 minutes.

Lockmen sub Remi Birch reduced the arrears a minute later, but Casuals added three more goals, on 62, 86 and 89 minutes.

★★★

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# CRACKER LIFTS MOOD OF FANS

Walsall 1 Bradford 1

WHEN Walsall fans look back on 2016, they will remember a year of highs that ultimately ended in play-off heartbreak.

A draw at home to Bradford, just a week before Christmas, is unlikely to be one of the highlights of an enthralling 12 months.

Yet its significance in terms of what supporters see in the future may go into 2017 and beyond. After defeats to Fleetwood and Oldham - the latter in the Checkatrade Trophy - many fans felt Walsall's season was over. Others were fearful Whitney's side would become embroiled in a relegation scrap.

And that meant, in their final home match of 2016, Walsall had to give fans something to cling on to heading into the new year. Thankfully they did, with a spirited performance full of quality lifting the gloom while also securing a point against a high-flying Bradford team.

### Basics

In the wake of back-to-back defeats, Whitney had spoken of the need to get back to basics.

And with that in mind, he sprung a surprise when naming his starting XI - with top scorer Erhun Oztumer left on the bench.

It was a move that saw the Saddlers line-up in a traditional 4-4-2 formation with Flo Cuvelier on the right, Joe Edwards on the left and Adam Chambers and Isaiah Osbourne central.

Having experimented with Oztumer up front in recent weeks, Whitney concluded the 25-year-old is more comfortable as an out-and-out number 10.

It was a bold decision to drop the man who has been Walsall's best player this season. But the switch to two banks of four made the Saddlers more organised.

Osbourne gave Walsall the lead with a smart finish from a swift counter, it was no surprise when Jordy Hiwula came back to haunt his former club by grabbing an equaliser.

This was a match where a draw was the right result. And while Stuart McCall will point to the fact his side had 18 shots compared to Walsall's 12, the vast majority were comfortably dealt with by Neil Etheridge.

## Broadway's success at a stroke



Broadway senior team at the meet. Back, Harriet Shepherd and Megan Butler. Front from left, Elodie Rollins, Jenson Proctor, Ewan Terry, Blake Webb and Callum Bird

BROADWAY Swimming Club had a great weekend recently, at the Wyre Forest Open Meet, to end the year on a high. During the meet they were introduced to Sascha Kindred OBE, one of the most successful British Paralympic Swimmers of all time.

Blake Webb, aged nine, won gold medals in the 100m and 50m freestyle, 50m butterfly, 50m backstroke and bronze in the 50m breaststroke. Harriet Shepherd, 15, took gold in the 200m butterfly and silver in the 200m individual medley, while Megan Butler, 15, took silver in the 200m breaststroke and bronze in the 50m breaststroke.

The club's younger swimmers, some of which were competing for the first time, all swam personal bests, among them were Elodie Rollins,

Amy Robatham, Callum Bird, Ewan Terry, Isabel Clarke, Jake Birmingham, Jenson Proctor, Matthias Henry and Riya Mistry.

The junior league swimmers made the final and gained promotion for Broadway, including Adam Guild, Alex Fisher, Amy Robatham, Blake Webb, Callum Bird, Chloe Mallon, Devin Fernando, Elodie Rollins, Emily Matthews, Ewan Terry, George Pattinson, Georgia Archer, Isabel Clarke, Jenson Proctor, Matthew Dowd, Matthias Henry, Mia Corden, Millie Harmon, Olivia Hough, Rhianna-Mae Powell, Rhys Peters, Robyn Dolan, Natalia Tura.

Broadway are always looking for more great swimmers to join and strengthen their team, if you think that is you, please call Alan on 01922 409760.

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